

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

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

China is expected to organise one signature event, an open debate on “Practicing **Multilateralism**, Reforming and Improving Global Governance” under the agenda item “Maintenance of international peace and security”. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi will chair the meeting. UN Secretary-General António Guterres is expected to brief.

In February, the Council is scheduled to hold a briefing on the Secretary-General’s biannual strategic-level report on the **threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh)**.

The annual briefing by **UN Police Commissioners** is also expected to take place during the month.

Middle Eastern issues on the programme include:

- **Syria**, monthly meeting on the political and humanitarian situations and possible additional meetings depending on developments in the country;
- **Yemen**, the monthly meeting on the situation in the country; and
- “**The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question**”, the monthly meeting, with the possibility of additional meetings depending on developments in Gaza and Israel.

African issues that will be discussed in February are:

- **Somalia**, renewal of the 2713 Al-Shabaab Sanctions regime and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 2713 Al-Shabaab Sanctions Committee;
- **Libya**, meeting on the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and briefing by the chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee;
- **Central African Republic (CAR)**, meeting on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA);
- **South Sudan**, briefing and consultations on the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS); and
- **Sudan**, briefing and consultations on the situation in the country pursuant to resolution 2715 of 1 December 2023 and renewal of the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee.

Regarding Asian issues, Council members will hold their semi-annual consultations on the **UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA)**. They will also receive a briefing on the work of the 1718 **Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) Sanctions Committee**.

February marks the third anniversary of Russia’s invasion of **Ukraine**. The Council is likely to have one or more meetings on the country during the month.

Other issues could be raised in February depending on developments, including on the situation in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**.

31 January 2025

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In Hindsight: The 2025 Peacebuilding Review

At the end of January, member states began the formal phase of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR), a process undertaken every five years to strengthen and refine UN peacebuilding efforts worldwide. To kick-start its engagement in this phase, the Security Council, at Algeria's initiative, adopted a presidential statement on 27 January, reaffirming its commitment to the process.

Algeria proposed an initial draft of the statement on 15 January. The Council last adopted a PBAR presidential statement in 2015. Some members cautioned that negotiating a statement too early in the process could undercut the broad consensus needed to pass General Assembly and Security Council resolutions by year-end. To avoid this, members opted for a concise text and deferred more contentious issues—explored in the 'formal phase' section—for later discussions.

The statement encourages greater coherence in peacebuilding efforts and emphasises the need to strengthen the performance and impact of the peacebuilding architecture. It also welcomes annual consultative meetings between the African Union Peace and Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) while stressing the importance of partnership between the UN and the African Union (AU), consistent with Chapter VIII of the UN Charter.

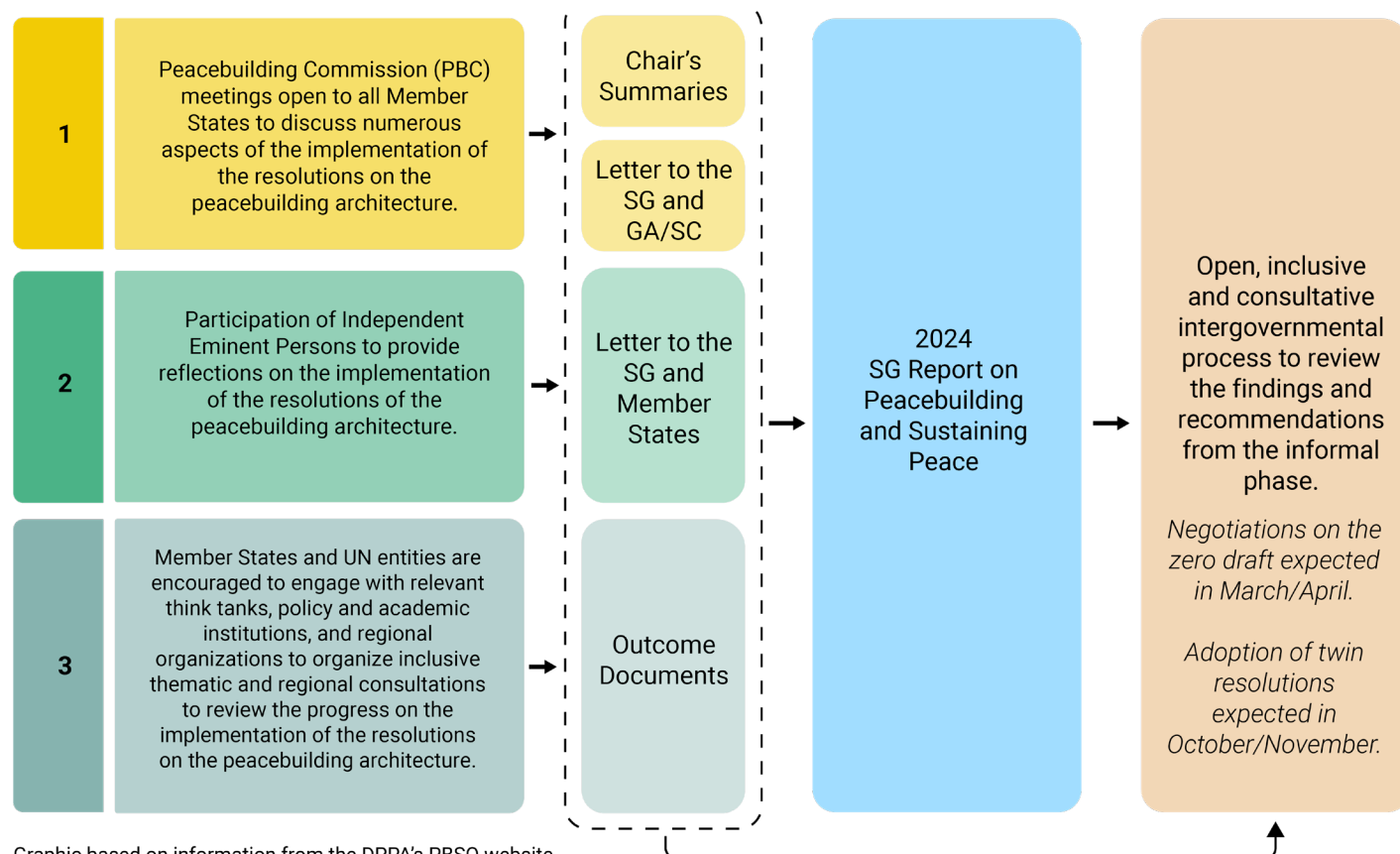
The 2025 PBAR in Context

Called for in resolutions 75/201 and 2558 (2020), this is the fourth review since the General Assembly and the Security Council established the three components of the peacebuilding architecture in 2005: the PBC, an intergovernmental advisory body; the

Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), a financial mechanism of first resort to sustain peace in situations at-risk; and the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), now integrated into the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA). PBSO is responsible for managing the PBF, supporting the PBC's work, and ensuring synergies across the UN system's peacebuilding work.

The fourth review comes at a time of significant geopolitical divisions and escalating risk of conflict in many parts of the world, underscoring the urgent need to act on recommendations from current and past reviews. Among member states, there is growing consensus that this review should prioritise advancing implementation over reiterating priorities.

The first review in 2010 (A/RES/65/7, S/RES/1947) emphasised improving operational effectiveness, resource mobilisation, and UN system integration. The 2015 review (A/RES/70/262, S/RES/2282) marked a pivotal shift with its emphasis on the concept of "sustaining peace," which reframed peacebuilding as a proactive, inclusive, and integrated process aimed at preventing conflict, addressing root causes, and ensuring coherence across the UN's development, security, and human rights pillars. The 2020 review (A/RES/75/201, S/RES/2558) was widely regarded as a rollover exercise, reinforcing the principles and priorities of 2015 while addressing emerging challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasising the need to involve the entire UN system in effective strategic planning, and reiterating the need for sustained financing and strengthened partnerships.



Graphic based on information from the DPPA's PBSO website.

In Hindsight: The 2025 Peacebuilding Review

According to the terms of reference that the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council circulated to all member states on 16 April 2024, the informal phase in 2024 would gather inputs through consultations and assessments, while the formal phase in 2025 would focus on intergovernmental negotiations to generate recommendations for adoption by the General Assembly and the Security Council by the end of the year.

2024 Informal Phase Highlights

The informal phase consisted of three tracks: (a) PBC meetings to assess progress; (b) reflections from independent eminent persons whom the Secretary-General selected based on current or past membership to relevant senior advisory boards and groups; and (c) perspectives gathered during thematic and regional consultations organised by member states, regional organisations, think tanks, and civil society across various regions.

In its letter to the General Assembly and the Security Council summarising the outcome of its meetings, the PBC highlighted the importance of national ownership, inclusive participation of women and youth, partnerships with financial institutions, leveraging regional cooperation, and enhancing coherence across UN bodies. The role of youth and education in peacebuilding was highlighted as an undervalued area requiring greater attention. It was recognised as both a fundamental right and a vital tool for conflict prevention and rebuilding trust. Drawing lessons from its flexible support for peacebuilding in The Gambia, the PBC identified the importance of respecting national needs, building institutional capacities, and ensuring adequate financial resources as key to its successful engagement and proposed that they should serve as the foundation for strengthening the architecture.

In their letter to the Secretary-General, which he subsequently shared with the General Assembly and the Security Council, the eminent persons pointed to implementation gaps in past recommendations and urged the review to prioritise actionable steps, including scaling sustainable financing, deepening inclusive participation, and strengthening the PBC as a global platform for prevention and impact.

The thematic and regional consultations offered diverse and valuable perspectives to strengthen peacebuilding efforts and tackle critical global challenges, including forced displacement, urbanisation, and the climate-conflict nexus. These consultations emphasised the importance of human rights, good governance, and sustainable financing as foundational pillars for peace while calling for specific actions such as empowering youth and women in leadership roles, implementing security sector reforms, integrating humanitarian and peacebuilding approaches to address displacement, and safeguarding civic space to enable inclusive participation. They also underscored the need to advance global technological governance, both to counter misinformation and hate speech and harness technology's potential for societal transformation.

These consultations have added to an already substantial volume of recommendations accumulated over successive reviews. This growing repository of inputs—ranging from insightful, actionable proposals to broader, more conceptual ideas—has made prioritisation a significant challenge. The Center on International Cooperation at New York University organised input to the 2020 PBAR into

a matrix, helping to categorise and highlight actionable priorities. No such systematic methodology was applied for the 2025 PBAR, leaving the new influx of recommendations harder to process and integrate effectively.

The Secretary-General's report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace drew on input from the three tracks of the informal phase. While the methodology of distilling from the flood of input is not explicitly outlined, his report remains a practical starting point. Among the key recommendations:

- Urging member states to embrace nationally-owned prevention and peacebuilding strategies as a universal priority. These should be anchored in human rights and backed by the UN system.
- Emphasising the critical role of women in peacebuilding, calling for at least 15% of ODA to conflict-affected countries to advance gender equality, with 1% allocated specifically to women's organisations.
- Pressing member states to reinvigorate voluntary funding to UN entities working on peacebuilding and the sustainable development goals, including ensuring adequate resources for resident coordinators' offices and sustained funding during post-mission transitions.
- Highlighting the need for adequate resources for the PBC, commensurate with the expansion of its scope and geographical focus, including the establishment of a dedicated conference facility.
- Urging broader voluntary contributions to the PBF and raising assessed funding to \$100 million per year as requested in his report (A/72/707-S/2018/43), as well as reallocating unspent peacekeeping funds to the PBF.
- Calling for the strengthening of the Peacebuilding Impact Hub to improve access to and use of disaggregated data, fostering greater accountability across the UN system in achieving effective implementation and measurable results.

The Formal Phase

For the formal stage of the review, two co-facilitators—Egypt for the General Assembly and Slovenia for the Security Council—have been appointed to conduct intergovernmental consultations. These consultations aim to produce agreed recommendations for consideration and decision by the General Assembly and the Security Council. Member states are expected to begin negotiating the text of the twin General Assembly and Security Council resolutions in March or April, with adoption planned between October and November 2025.

A number of contentious issues are expected to come up during the negotiations, each requiring constructive solutions to ensure progress in peacebuilding efforts.

First, the concept of national ownership remains a point of divergence. Some member states emphasise sovereignty, viewing it as a principle to safeguard against external interference in domestic affairs. Others advocate for national ownership as a means to ensure inclusive and participatory peacebuilding, with greater involvement of women, youth, civil society, and other “agents of change”. Bridging these interpretations requires constructive dialogue, trust-building, and a shared commitment to balancing sovereignty with inclusive, locally driven approaches to peacebuilding.

Second, financing for peacebuilding remains a pressing concern.

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The General Assembly, through resolution A/RES/78/257 adopted on 22 December 2023, approved \$50 million per year in assessed contributions to the PBF starting in 2025, providing more predictable and sustained support. However, demand for the Fund continues to outstrip its resources. While some advocate for increasing both assessed and voluntary contributions, others insist that voluntary funding should remain the primary source, opposing any increase in assessed contributions. Beyond the PBF, the Secretary-General's report serves as a call to commit more resources to both UN and non-UN peacebuilding efforts, framing peacebuilding not as a cost but as a necessary investment for global stability and development. During the PBAR negotiations, member states must reconcile differing views on burden-sharing and prioritisation of peacebuilding within increasingly constrained budgets. To seek common ground, member states could shift the focus of discussions from sources of funding to proof of impact, based on disaggregated and independently verifiable data, for all UN peacebuilding activities.

Third, the role of the PBC in conflict prevention remains contentious, particularly when it involves sensitive issues such as human rights and climate, peace and security. While some member states have proposed initiatives like joint meetings between the PBC and the Human Rights Council, others remain wary of overreach and potential interference with sovereignty. Though the Pact for the Future, adopted in September 2024, draws on the 2016 resolutions that enhanced the PBC's preventive mandate, debate over its interpretation continues. Negotiations can benefit from focusing on examples where the PBC has supported nationally identified priorities, such as climate, peace and security initiatives in the Pacific Islands and the Sahel or transitional justice and human rights efforts in The Gambia. These examples provide valuable guidance

for shaping future action, demonstrating how seemingly contentious issues can gain broad support when grounded in nationally owned and led strategies and initiatives.

Fourth, identifying agreed priorities and tracking progress on their implementation can be a cumbersome process in view of the vast array of recommendations from the current and past reviews. This requires pulling together and assessing progress across diverse inputs, which requires dedicated capacity. Member states can support efforts to map this information, organising it into a structured framework of agreed priorities to make implementation a central focus of PBAR discussions. In terms of the PBC's work, a focus on implementation could be achieved by shifting the debate from broad thematic priorities to practical ways of sustaining support for countries requesting assistance, including by enhancing coordination between the Chair and the new Vice-Chairs to meet the needs of PBC's expanded scope and conducting regular assessments of its impact on the ground. By making implementation a key focus, member states can maximise the PBC's impact, foster stronger collaboration, and build trust in the peacebuilding process.

The 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review offers member states the opportunity to demonstrate that their commitments are more than just words on paper. It is a chance to turn promises into tangible action and show that the ideals of peacebuilding can be realised through the hard work of implementation. As input from the informal phase highlights, this requires strengthened mechanisms to track progress, enhanced collaboration across national, regional, and global levels, and the mobilisation of sustainable and predictable financing. By placing implementation and impact at the heart of this review, member states can ensure that the Peacebuilding Architecture has a real chance to fulfil its promise of supporting lasting peace.

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Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

On 3 January, the Security Council convened for a briefing under "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" (S/PV.9830) agenda item. The meeting was called by Algeria to discuss Israel's attacks against hospitals in Gaza. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk and the World Health Organisation representative for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Rik Peepkorn, briefed. Tanya Haj-Hassan, a medical practitioner at Medical Aid for Palestinians, also briefed.

On 17 January, Security Council members received a briefing in closed consultations on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". Algeria requested the meeting to discuss the situation of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini briefed.

On 20 January, the Security Council held its quarterly open debate on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" (S/PV.9841). UN Secretary-General António Guterres briefed. Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmed Attaf chaired the meeting.

On 23 January, the Security Council held an open briefing on the situation of children in Gaza under "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" agenda item (S/PV.9846). Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Tom Fletcher briefed. Bisan Nateel, a representative from the Tamer Institute for Community Education, also briefed.

On 28 January, Council members convened for an open briefing on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question", focused on UNRWA. Lazzarini and the Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, Jan Egeland, briefed (S/PV.9852).

Lebanon

On 13 January, Council members held closed consultations on the situation in Lebanon. Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert and Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix briefed.

On 16 January, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement on Lebanon (S/PRST/2025/1). The presidential statement welcomed the election of the President of the Republic of Lebanon

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Joseph Aoun and the designation of Nawaf Salam as Prime Minister. It also welcomed the 29 November 2024 cessation of hostilities arrangement between Israel and Lebanon (S/2024/870), expressed concern about reported violations, and called for all violations of the arrangement to stop.

Arria-formula Meeting on Commercial Spyware

On 14 January, the US convened an Arria-formula meeting on the implications of the proliferation and misuse of commercial spyware on the maintenance of international peace and security. The meeting was co-sponsored by Council members France, the Republic of Korea (ROK), and the UK, together with Australia, Austria, Canada, Estonia, Finland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, and Sweden. Briefings were delivered by John Scott-Railton, senior researcher at the Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto, which investigates digital espionage targeting civil society, among other issues; Shane Huntley, senior director at Google's Threat Analysis Group, which focuses on detecting, analysing, and disrupting government-backed threats against Google and its users; and Julia Gavarrete, a Salvadoran journalist specialising in political issues, migration, and human rights, who has been the target of spyware attacks.

Cyprus

On 16 January, the Council held consultations on the situation in Cyprus. Special Representative and Head of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) Colin Stewart briefed the Council on the recent developments and key findings from two Secretary-General's reports on UNFICYP: the semi-annual report on UNFICYP (S/2025/6), and the report on his good offices in Cyprus (S/2025/7).

Democratic Republic of the Congo

On 15 January, Security Council members met in closed consultations to discuss the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). France, the penholder on the DRC, requested the meeting after the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) circulated a white note to Council members on 9 January describing developments in eastern DRC, particularly the recent offensive by the Mouvement du 23 Mars (M23) rebel group in North Kivu province, the epicentre of the conflict in eastern DRC. Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the DRC and Head of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) Bintou Keita briefed the Council via videoconference (VTC). The Council met again to discuss the situation in the DRC on 26 January (S/PV. 9849) and 28 January (S/PV.9853).

UNIFIL and UNDOF

On 17 January, the Security Council held a briefing (S/PV.9840) on the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). Russia requested the meeting to address the latest developments in the respective areas of operations, including the challenges peacekeepers face in carrying out their mandates. Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Head of the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) and Interim Head of UNDOF Major General

Patrick Gauchat briefed via videoconference (VTC). Israel, Lebanon, and Syria participated under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

Ukraine

On 13 January, the UK—with co-sponsorship from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, and the US—convened an Arria-formula meeting, titled “Violations of international humanitarian law against Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilian detainees”. The briefers included: Pablo de Greiff, a member of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Ukraine; Valerii Horishnii, a former prisoner of war, senior sergeant, and instructor at Ukraine's National Guard, who fought in the 2022 battle of Mariupol and spent two years in Russian captivity; Nariman Dzhelyal, a Crimean Tatar journalist and activist who was sentenced in September 2022 to 17 years in prison by the Russian-controlled “Supreme Court of Crimea” in connection with an alleged gas pipeline sabotage case and was subsequently returned to Ukraine in June 2024; and Maksym Butkevych, a Ukrainian human rights defender, journalist, civic activist, and military serviceman, who was held in Russian captivity for over two years and, in March 2023, was sentenced to 13 years in a penal colony. He was returned to Ukraine in October 2024.

On 16 January, the Council held a briefing on Ukraine (S/PV.9839). Slovenia and the US—the co-penholders on political issues in Ukraine—requested the meeting to receive a general update on developments. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed the Council. The representatives of Estonia, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine participated in the meeting under rule 37.

On 24 January, Russia convened an Arria-formula meeting on Ukraine, titled “Beyond the Battlefield: Atrocities of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Against Civilians”. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzya (Russia) delivered the opening remarks. The briefers, who participated via videoconference, were: Maxim Grigoriev, member of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation; Thomas Röper, a German journalist; and two residents of Selydove, Vladimir Romanenko and Vladimir Pogorelov, who were described in the concept note prepared by Russia for the meeting as “victim[s] of the Armed Forces of Ukraine”.

League of Arab States

On 23 January, the Security Council held a briefing on “Cooperation between the Security Council and the League of Arab States” (S/PV.9845). The briefers were: Mohamed Khaled Khiari, the Assistant Secretary-General for Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, and Ahmed Aboul Gheit, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States (LAS). Algeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmed Attaf, chaired the meeting.

Counter-Terrorism

On 21 January, the Council held an open debate on counter-terrorism in Africa under the agenda item “Maintenance of international peace and security” (S/PV.9842 and S/PV.9842 Resumption I). The meeting resumed and was completed on 24 January (S/PV.9842 Resumption II). Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmed Attaf chaired the first part of the meeting, which was one of Algeria's

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signature events for its presidency. Deputy Secretary-General Amina J Mohammed; African Union (AU) Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security Bankole Adeoye; and former UN and AU official Said Djinnit briefed. 45 member states participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure. Permanent Observer of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to the UN Kinza Aby Jawara-N'Jai, Head of the EU Delegation to the European Union (EU) Stavros Lambrinidis, and Deputy Special Representative of the International Criminal Police Organisation (INTERPOL) to the UN Dominique Bahorera also participated in the meeting under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

On 24 January, the Council adopted a presidential statement on counter-terrorism (S/PRST/2025/2). The presidential statement was proposed by Algeria in connection with its signature event on counter-terrorism in Africa.

On 24 January, Council members also issued a press statement condemning terrorist attacks carried out by Al-Qaida affiliate Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) in the Point Triple area in Benin on 8 January (SC/15980).

Haiti

On 22 January, the Council received its regular quarterly briefing (S/PV.9844) from Special Representative and Head of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) María Isabel Salvador on recent political, security, and humanitarian developments in the country and on the Secretary-General's latest report on BINUH (S/2025/28). UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Executive Director Ghada Fathi Waly also briefed. Canada (on behalf of the Economic and Social Council Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti), Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Kenya, and Suriname (on behalf of the Caribbean Community) participated in the meeting under rule 37

of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

Colombia

On 22 January, the Security Council held an open briefing on Colombia (S/PV.9843). Special Representative and Head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu briefed on recent developments and the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on the mission (S/2024/968). The Council was also briefed by Armando Wouriyu Valbuena, a representative of the Special High-Level Instance for Ethnic Groups (IEANPE). The IEANPE was created by the 2016 Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace between the government of Colombia and the former rebel group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) to monitor the implementation of provisions related to the agreement's ethnic chapter. Diego Tovar, a former FARC-EP combatant and signatory to the 2016 peace agreement, participated in the meeting under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

International Court of Justice

On 24 January, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2770, which fixed 27 May as the date for the election to fill the vacancy left by the resignation of the former President of the ICJ, Judge Nawaf Salam.

Myanmar

On 30 January, Council members held closed consultations on Myanmar. The meeting was requested by the UK, the penholder on the file. Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar Julie Bishop and Head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Geneva and Director of the Coordination Division Ramesh Rajasingham briefed.

Syria

Expected Council Action

In February, the Council is expected to hold a meeting on the political and humanitarian developments in Syria.

Key Recent Developments

Following the ouster of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, the caretaker authorities focused on structuring a governance framework and consolidating their power, appointing individuals close to Ahmed al-Sharaa (leader of the new administration and head of Council-listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)) to key positions. The authorities announced agreements with some armed rebel factions to disband and integrate into the unified Syrian national army; however, specific details remain unclear. They have also initiated a reconciliation process with former army officials. Recent media reports suggest that several foreign Islamist fighters have been appointed to senior military positions. Sharaa has reportedly also

proposed granting citizenship to foreign fighters and their families for their role in the fight against Assad. (For background, see the brief on Syria in our January 2025 *Monthly Forecast*.)

In late December 2024, the caretaker authorities announced plans to convene a national dialogue conference aimed at bringing together Syria's diverse political and sectarian groups to discuss the country's political transition. While initial media reports suggested the conference might take place in early January, the foreign minister of the Syrian caretaker government, Asaad Hassan al-Shibani, announced on 7 January that additional preparation time was required. He also outlined plans to establish an expanded preparatory committee to ensure broader representation from all segments and governorates of Syria. At press time, no date had been set for the conference. (For more information, see our 7 January *What's In Blue* story.)

The past few weeks have witnessed a flurry of high-level

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA Security Council Resolution S/RES/2254 (18 December 2015) was the resolution focused exclusively on a political solution to the Syrian crisis. It was adopted unanimously. Security Council Press Statement SC/15943 (17 December 2024) called for the implementation of an inclusive and Syrian-led political process based on the key principles listed in resolution 2254.

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engagements among key stakeholders aimed at addressing Syria's evolving political and security landscape. On 9 January, an informal group of five states—France, Germany, Italy, the US, and the UK, referred to as “the Quintet”—and European Commission High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President Kaja Kallas met in Rome. Media reports quoted Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani as describing the meeting as critical in initiating discussions about potential changes to EU sanctions on Syria.

On 12 January, Saudi Arabia hosted a meeting of key regional and international interlocutors on Syria, bringing together representatives from 17 countries, including Syria. The meeting, which built on the ministerial discussions held in Aqaba on 14 December 2024, was attended by Kallas, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Ahmed Aboul-Gheit, Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Jassem Mohamed al-Budaiwi, and UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen. Also on 12 January, Riyadh hosted a ministerial meeting of the Arab countries, attended by Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the United Arab Emirates. Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon, as well as Aboul-Gheit and Budaiwi.

In a 13 January media interview, Pedersen noted the relative stability in many parts of the country while acknowledging some security incidents, including attacks on minority groups. During the meeting in Riyadh, Pedersen mentioned receiving assurances from Syrian caretaker authorities about plans to establish a new transitional body following the national dialogue conference. He underscored the relevance of resolution 2254 adopted in 2015, particularly the provisions relating to a Syrian-led transitional process aimed at drafting a new constitution, holding free and fair elections, and safeguarding Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence. He underlined the importance of lifting sanctions for rebuilding Syria, emphasising the need for the transition process to advance and for the international community to respond appropriately.

On 20 January, Pedersen arrived in Damascus for his second visit since 8 December 2024 and held meetings with key Syrian stakeholders, including Sharaa and Shibani. Council members convened in closed consultations on 30 January to receive an update from Pedersen on the latest developments in the country. (For more information, see our 29 January *What's in Blue* story.)

The security situation in northern Syria remains fragile, with various factions competing for control and influence. Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) forces launched an offensive in the territories controlled by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), capturing strategic locations around Manbij and Tal Rifat. The clashes intensified near Tishrin dam on the Euphrates River in Manbij countryside in eastern Aleppo, which remains a critical source of water and electricity for SDF-controlled territories. Türkiye has reportedly conducted airstrikes in the area, raising concerns about potential damage to the dam. Additionally, it has also targeted several locations in the Kobani countryside and Aleppo's eastern countryside. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), more than 420 people have been killed, including 41 civilians, since 12 December 2024. Media reports have said that fighting has erupted between tribal factions and the SDF while the Syrian caretaker authorities have deployed forces close to the Tishrin dam area.

Negotiations reportedly are underway between HTS and the SDF to determine the future of Kurdish forces in northern Syria. Media reports suggest that the SDF had proposed maintaining its autonomy as a military bloc within the Syrian army, which the caretaker authorities rejected. In parallel, the US has been engaging Türkiye, HTS, and the SDF, while discussions continued between Türkiye and HTS, according to a 19 January Reuters article. Previously, the US had expressed support for “a managed transition” for SDF's role in the region. Meanwhile, Türkiye seeks to disarm the SDF and dismantle any structures supporting Kurdish autonomy in Syria as well as eliminating elements linked to YPG, a Kurdish militia.

Furthermore, since Assad's ousting, Israel has carried out hundreds of airstrikes across Syria, targeting its air bases, ammunition depots, military equipment, and positions of forces loyal to the new administration. Israel has also launched a ground incursion extending deeper into the Golan and Syrian territory. (For background and more information, see the brief on Syria in our January 2025 *Monthly Forecast* and 17 January *What's In Blue* story.)

On 24 December 2024, the Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) released the monthly report on the implementation of resolution 2118 of 27 September 2013, which required the verification and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles. The report highlighted that the evolving political and security dynamics in Syria present a crucial opportunity for the OPCW to clarify the full extent and scope of Syria's chemical weapons programme. It emphasised that the immediate priority is to prevent proliferation and any further use of chemical weapons. To achieve this, the OPCW Secretariat must identify, access, and verify all relevant chemical weapons sites and facilities as soon as conditions permit. The second priority, the report added, is to protect and preserve documents, evidence, and witnesses related to the Syrian chemical weapons programme, with the goal of achieving its complete elimination.

Key Issues and Options

The most pressing issue before the Council is how to ensure a credible, transparent, and inclusive political process, guided by the principles of resolution 2254, that can prioritise the needs and aspirations of all Syrians, prevent fragmentation of the country, preserve state institutions, and establish a non-sectarian and representative governance structure.

A related issue is tackling the prevailing insecurity in the country, ensuring the protection of civilians (particularly religious and ethnic minorities), addressing human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, seeking accountability for past crimes and atrocities, and preventing the resurgence of terrorist and extremist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL\Da'esh). Recent reports have highlighted arrests, detentions, and incidents of extrajudicial and revenge killings in some parts of the country, particularly targeting the Alawite community and supporters of the former Assad government.

Across Syria, multiple armed groups maintain influence and territorial control. One of the pertinent issues before the international community remains how to ensure an orderly security transition in the country. The Council needs to navigate the competing interests

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of regional and international actors that continue to shape Syria's political and security landscape, while underscoring respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria.

The Council is expected to continue monitoring the developments on the ground closely. In addition to regular briefings from Pedersen, the Council could consider holding a private meeting with interested regional and international stakeholders and invite Syrian representatives to discuss, among other things, how to adapt the political process to the new realities on the ground and hear their views on an appropriate strategy for the way forward.

The Council could consider issuing a presidential statement to express support for a Syrian-led political transition and key provisions of resolution 2254, stressing the importance of an inclusive, transparent, and credible transitional process that would pave the way for constitution-making and elections. The statement could reinforce the Council's backing for Pedersen's efforts in facilitating this process.

Another key issue is how to alleviate the growing humanitarian needs throughout the country and ensure suitable conditions for the safe return of Syrian refugees. Council members could consider calling for an international conference to mobilise support for Syria, including through securing additional funding for a humanitarian response and addressing key issues such as economic development and reconstruction.

Council and Wider Dynamics

The Council and the broader UN membership appear to be adapting their responses to keep pace with the rapidly unfolding developments and determine the appropriate path forward. While there is acknowledgment of positive messaging from Damascus on a range of issues, including governance, many countries are likely to evaluate their stance based on the caretaker authorities' concrete actions in the months ahead. Key regional and international stakeholders have initiated high-level engagements on Syria, which are likely to continue in the coming months. The active outreach of Western members to Damascus and the absence of Iran and Russia, Assad's

key allies, from these engagements reinforces the shifting geopolitical landscape. Russia, which had maintained a significant military presence in the country over the years, has reportedly been transferring military equipment out of Syria, including to eastern Libya. (For more information, see the brief on Syria in our January 2025 *Monthly Forecast*.)

Sanctions on Syria have been a long-standing and contentious issue, causing divisions among Council members for years. Members do not appear to have started discussing the impact of UN sanctions on the current situation although the US has moved quickly on this front. (Both Jolani and HTS are included under the 1267/1989/2253 sanctions regime targeting ISIL/Da'esh and Al-Qaida.) Following the ousting of Assad, the administration of then-US President Joe Biden seemed flexible in offering some concessions on this front. For instance, on 6 January, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control issued a general license for six months, authorising transactions with governing institutions in Syria, including those relating to energy, petroleum, natural gas, and electricity. According to media reports, the Biden administration also issued a limited sanctions waiver for regional countries and Ukraine to provide assistance to Syria. At the time of writing, it remains to be seen how US foreign policy will evolve regarding developments in Syria and the broader region under the administration of President Donald Trump.

Council members have displayed starkly different views over the years on a range of issues related to the chemical weapons track, 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. Several members have consistently expressed support for the OPCW's work, maintaining that it is credible and essential, but other members, such as China and Russia, have claimed that its work is biased and politicised. It remains unclear how the new realities on the ground will affect the work of the OPCW and the dynamics in the Council.

Denmark is the penholder on the Syria humanitarian file.

South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council will hold a briefing, followed by consultations, to discuss the situation in South Sudan. Special Representative and Head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Nicholas Haysom is expected to brief on the Secretary-General's 90-day report on South Sudan, dated 24 January, and developments in the country.

The mandate of UNMISS expires on 30 April.

Key Recent Developments

The most recent quarterly report of the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC)—which is responsible

for overseeing the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS)—covering the period from 1 October to 31 December 2024, was released on 20 January. The report highlighted limited progress following the decision of South Sudanese authorities to extend the transitional period, postponing general elections until December 2026. It observed that the election-related bodies continue to suffer from a lack of adequate funding and have made slow progress in advancing key tasks, such as preparing the permanent constitution and moving the election process forward. The report noted that South Sudanese President Salva Kiir agreed to return the National Security Act 2014 (Amendment) Bill 2024 to the cabinet

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOUTH SUDAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2731 (30 May 2024) renewed the South Sudan sanctions regime until 31 May 2025 and extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee until 1 July. S/RES/2729 (29 April 2024) renewed the mandate of UNMISS until 30 April 2025. **Secretary-General's Report S/2025/54** (24 January 2025) was the Secretary-General's 90-day report on UNMISS. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9778** (7 November 2024) was a meeting on the situation in South Sudan.

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for re-tabling before the Transitional National Legislative Assembly. The bill granted the National Security Service broad powers to arrest and detain suspects without a warrant. (For background and more information, see the brief on South Sudan in our November 2024 *Monthly Forecast*.)

Regarding the transitional security arrangements, the RJMEC's report said that the deployment of the Necessary Unified Forces (NUF) remained limited, with no progress since the deployment of eight military battalions by April 2024. It further highlighted the lack of progress in the commencement of Phase II training of the NUF and the commissioning of middle-command echelon officers.

The Secretary-General's 24 January report, covering developments from 16 October 2024 to 15 January, provided an update on the Tumaini Peace Initiative, which aims to reconcile the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) and the holdout groups, facilitated by Kenya in Nairobi. Negotiations, stalled since mid-July 2024, resumed on 4 December 2024 but faltered again because of disagreements over the agenda. The government delegation sought to revisit the eight protocols signed in July 2024 and separate the Tumaini talks from the revitalised agreement; opposition groups rejected this approach.

Four of the opposition groups involved in the mediation talks formed an umbrella group, the United Peoples Alliance (UPA), while National Salvation Front leader Thomas Cirilo reaffirmed his refusal to join the talks. The talks resumed on 20 January but continue to face significant challenges. While the government seeks to incorporate the holdout groups into the revitalised agreement, UPA argues that R-ARCSS is no longer relevant and insists that any outcome of the Tumaini talks should be a stand-alone agreement.

The security situation remains volatile, marked by frequent security incidents and persistent intercommunal and subnational violence in many areas of the country. During the period covered by the Secretary-General's 24 January report, UNMISS verified 250 incidents of violence affecting 953 civilians, including 327 deaths, marking a 27 percent increase in incidents compared to the previous reporting period. The report noted that UNMISS maintained four temporary operating bases in Koch, Jamjang, Abiemnom, and Tambura to increase operational reach, deter attacks against civilians, and secure main supply routes.

In a 16 January press release, UNMISS expressed deep concern about reports of a series of violent clashes between the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (that is, government forces) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition in Nagero county of Western Equatoria state. The clashes continued in the following days, reportedly resulting in numerous civilian deaths and causing widespread displacement.

In mid-January, riots erupted in Juba following reports that the Sudanese Armed Forces and allied groups had killed 29 South Sudanese migrant workers after capturing Wad Madani, in Sudan's Al Jazira state, from the Rapid Support Forces, a Sudanese paramilitary group. South Sudanese national police reportedly confirmed that the riots, which spread across four states, led to the deaths of 16 Sudanese nationals in reprisal attacks.

On 17 January, the African Union (AU) Ad Hoc High-Level Committee for South Sudan, known as the C5 (comprising Algeria,

Chad, Nigeria, Rwanda, and South Africa), arrived in Juba for a ministerial visit. According to a press statement delivered by South Africa's Foreign Minister Ronald Ozzy Lamola on behalf of the C5, the members met with President Kiir, First Vice-President Riek Machar, African ambassadors in Juba, and officials from RJMEC, UNMISS, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. The C5 emphasised the need to safeguard South Sudan's political and security gains and announced plans to hold a heads of state meeting on the sidelines of the AU Summit in February in Addis Ababa.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 9 December 2024, a delegation from the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan arrived in Kenya for a five-day visit aimed at promoting human rights and ensuring accountability for violations in South Sudan. During the visit, the delegation met with senior Kenyan government officials, representatives of international organisations, and civil society groups. The commission emphasised the importance of regional support for South Sudan's transition, particularly from Kenya, which is facilitating the Tumaini Peace Initiative. The delegation also met with the Tumaini initiative's negotiating team, stressing the urgency of safeguarding and accelerating key state-building measures in the peace agreement, including transitional justice, constitution-making, and reforms in security, the judiciary, and the economy.

Women, Peace and Security

Ahead of the 7 November 2024 Council briefing on the situation in South Sudan, the Council members that had signed on to the shared commitments on women, peace and security – which then included Ecuador, France, Guyana, Japan, Malta, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Switzerland, the UK, and the US – delivered a joint statement calling for women in South Sudan to be given more space to participate in politics "at all levels across all regions", including in all election processes. Among other things, the statement noted that women and girls in South Sudan, including from refugee and internally displaced communities, "suffer among the highest levels of sexual and gender-based violence globally", and it called on the government of South Sudan to hold perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence to account, end impunity, and take measures to protect civilians. It also called on the international community to provide direct support to women's organisations assisting women and girls in South Sudan.

Key Issues and Options

The fundamental concern for the Council is the significant political and security challenges in South Sudan stemming from delays in the political transition and the implementation of the R-ARCSS. A key issue in this regard is what the Council can do to encourage the parties to make progress towards implementing the outstanding tasks of R-ARCSS and creating conditions necessary for holding elections, including providing adequate financial support to the election-related bodies. The shrinking political and civic space in the country also continues to be a particular concern for several Council members.

One option for the Council would be to invite the Interim Chairperson of the RJMEC, Major General (Retired) Charles Tai Gituai, to brief on the challenges facing South Sudan, including the implementation of the revitalised agreement and the progress in the ongoing Tumaini initiative mediation talks.

Council members could consider holding an informal interactive dialogue (IID) with the various stakeholders of the South Sudanese political process, the leadership of UNMISS, and interested regional and subregional member states and organisations. (The IID is a

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closed format that, unlike closed consultations, allows for the participation of non-UN officials and briefers.)

Another option for Council members would be to issue a press statement expressing concern about the consistent delays in implementing the peace agreement. The statement could urge all stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue to address outstanding tasks, including the agreed-upon benchmarks for holding peaceful general elections, in a timely manner. It could also call on all parties involved in the Tumaini Initiative, including non-signatories, to engage in good faith to resolve their differences.

An additional key issue for the Council is the humanitarian and food security situations. A related issue is the ongoing restrictions on humanitarian access and violence against aid workers in South Sudan. The Secretary-General's 24 January report documented 111 incidents related to humanitarian access, including numerous attacks on humanitarian facilities, staff, and assets, between October 2024 and January. An option would be to seek regular briefings on these matters from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The impact of the conflict in neighbouring Sudan on the humanitarian, political, and security situations in South Sudan remains a matter of concern for Council members. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), approximately one million people, the majority of whom are South Sudanese refugee returnees, have crossed into South Sudan since the outbreak of fighting in Sudan on 15 April 2023. The influx of refugees and

returnees has exacerbated the strain on local communities, which are already grappling with diminishing resources.

Council Dynamics

Most Council members have similar concerns about the delays in implementing the R-ARCSS, the ongoing sub-national and intercommunal violence, and the economic and humanitarian crises in South Sudan. Members, however, have diverging views about the context of the situation and the extent to which the Council can and should apply pressure on the parties to fully implement the peace agreement.

These dynamics were apparent during the Council's 7 November 2024 briefing on the situation in South Sudan. Several Council members expressed regret and concern over the decision of South Sudanese authorities to extend the transitional period. The US was the most critical, expressing "profound disappointment" and criticising South Sudan's leaders for lack of political will. It said that UNMISS "should not support elections unless and until the [t]ransitional [g]overnment dedicates and deploys its own resources—human and capital—to that effort". Other members such as China, Russia and the A3+1 (Algeria, Sierra Leone, Guyana, and then-member Mozambique) took note of the decision and highlighted the progress made by the South Sudanese government despite the country's severe challenges, including the dire humanitarian situation, intercommunal violence, and the economic crisis.

The US is the penholder on South Sudan.

UNRCCA (Central Asia)

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

Imnadze last briefed Council members in closed consultations on 23 July 2024. Among other matters, he provided an update on the UNRCCA's activities pertaining to counter-terrorism, water management, and the women, peace, and security and youth, peace and security agendas. Imnadze also covered the border negotiations between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the situation in Afghanistan and its impact on Central Asia, including the construction of the Qosh Tepa canal, and the role played by civil society in the region.

Since Imnadze's last briefing, officials from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have completed negotiations on delimiting their border. On 4 December 2024, the governments of both countries announced that they had "reached an agreement and fully completed the drawing of the remaining sections of the Kyrgyz-Tajik state border" and given instructions "to begin the process of drawing up the final

documents". The announcement came after months of negotiations and several bouts of violence between the two countries, including clashes in September 2022 in which dozens of civilians were killed and thousands more were displaced.

Member states have continued to jostle for influence in Central Asia. In early July 2024, Chinese President Xi Jinping travelled to the region for a five-day tour that included state visits to Kazakhstan and Tajikistan and the annual meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). During the visit to Tajikistan, Xi and Tajik President Emomali Rahmon signed a joint statement announcing the establishment of a "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership" between China and Tajikistan. Chinese officials also attended the 27 December 2024 commencement ceremony for a railway project that will connect China to Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which is set to begin construction in July.

On 27 September 2024, then-US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with foreign ministers and representatives from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan under the auspices of the "C5+1 diplomatic platform". In a statement issued after the meeting, the US Embassy in Kazakhstan noted that the participants discussed "steps toward enhanced regional security

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

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cooperation in pursuance of a shared vision for a peaceful Central Asia” and said that Blinken had underscored the importance of upholding the UN Charter, including with respect to human rights.

On 27 November 2024, Russian President Vladimir Putin travelled to Kazakhstan, where he attended a Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) summit and met with Kazakh President Qasym-Jomart Toqayev. According to media reports, Putin and Toqayev discussed boosting energy and industry ties. On 22 January, the Russian defence ministry announced that Russia and Uzbekistan had signed a strategic military partnership programme for the period spanning 2026 to 2030.

On 5 June 2024, the 11th round of the annual High-Level Political and Security Dialogue between the European Union and the countries of Central Asia was held in Brussels. Among other matters, participants discussed regional cooperation on several key issues, including counter-terrorism and violent extremism, drug trafficking, border management, and cyber security.

In early August 2024, then-Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida was scheduled to travel to Astana to attend the inaugural “Central Asia plus Japan” summit, where he was reportedly expected to unveil a \$2 billion economic investment package; however, Kishida’s visit was cancelled after an earthquake struck western Japan the day before the summit was scheduled to begin.

Several Central Asian states have pursued closer relations with the Taliban administration in Afghanistan in recent months. On 17 August 2024, Taliban officials announced the finalisation of trade and investment agreements worth \$2.5 billion with Uzbekistan when Uzbek Prime Minister Abdulla Aripov visited Kabul. 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. Taliban officials have reportedly agreed on a “cooperation roadmap” with Kazakhstan aimed at boosting economic relations and increasing trade, while Turkmenistan has invested over \$1.5 billion in joint projects in Afghanistan. Work on a long-delayed gas pipeline connecting Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan also began in September 2024.

In late June and early July 2024, Secretary-General António Guterres travelled to Central Asia, visiting Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and UNRCCA’s headquarters in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan.

From 10 to 12 September 2024, the UNRCCA, the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, and the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions organised a regional conference on the Counter-Terrorism Early Warning Network for Central Asia with support from the UN Peace and Development Trust Fund and the governments of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

On 3 to 4 October 2024, Imnadze participated in a regional

conference dedicated to the global Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda in Central Asia and Afghanistan. Imnadze’s remarks emphasised the importance of the *Pact for the Future* and highlighted its role in driving implementation of the WPS agenda at the regional level. He also stressed the significance of positive regional dynamics in promoting gender equality and overcoming barriers to the meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding, climate action, and other areas.

From 29 to 30 October 2024, the UNRCCA organised an “Expert Meeting on Water, Energy, Environment, and Climate Cooperation in Central Asia”. Participants in the meeting discussed recent developments in water, energy, environment, and climate collaboration in Central Asia and strategic priorities for the future.

Key Issues and Options

One of the main issues for the Council is determining how to make the best use of the UNRCCA’s expertise and deciding whether there is anything the Council can do to support its efforts to facilitate preventive diplomacy and regional cooperation. The Council could choose to hold an open briefing on the UNRCCA, which would allow members to express support for its work and raise awareness of its activities. This open briefing could be followed by closed consultations to allow for a more frank and detailed exchange with Imnadze. The Council could also choose to hold a debate to give the Central Asian states an opportunity to discuss the work of the UNRCCA in public.

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

Council Dynamics

Council members are generally supportive of the UNRCCA and view it as an important tool in promoting cooperation in Central Asia. Prior to mid-2018, Council members often issued press statements expressing support for the UNRCCA and its work and encouraging increased cooperation and coordination among the Central Asian countries, the UNRCCA, and “relevant regional organisations”. However, Council members have been unable to agree on a press statement on the UNRCCA since this time, owing to disagreements among the permanent members about including references to specific regional organisations, including the Commonwealth of Independent States, the CSTO, and the SCO.

Press elements commending then-Special Representative and Head of the UNRCCA Natalia Gherman for her efforts and expressing support for UNRCCA’s work were read out following the UNRCCA consultations in January 2023.

Sudan

Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council is expected to receive the regular 120-day briefing on the situation in Sudan. The Council is also expected to renew the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee.

The 1591 Sudan sanctions regime—including targeted sanctions (assets freeze and travel bans) and an arms embargo—expires on 12 September.

Key Recent Developments

Since launching its offensive in late September, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) has made 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 these areas. Meanwhile, the SAF also intensified its military operations in other parts of the country, including Al Jazira and Sennar states, achieving notable successes. On 11 January, the SAF recaptured Wad Madani, the capital of Al Jazira and a strategically significant city south of Khartoum, located at the crossroads of key supply routes connecting several states. However, the SAF has also faced setbacks in some areas.

The fighting has been accompanied by reports of mass civilian casualties, including revenge killings and torture, targeting individuals based on alleged affiliation or ethnicity. Following the capture of Wad Madani, media reports indicated that the SAF and allied forces committed widespread violations against civilians, including torture, extrajudicial killings, and destruction of property across several areas in Al Jazira. The RSF has also been reported to have carried out attacks on villages in the south and east of Al Jazira, resulting in the deaths of at least 21 civilians.

In a 15 January statement, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan, Clementine Nkweta-Salami, expressed deep concern about reports of recent attacks on civilians. She highlighted reports indicating significant civilian casualties, destruction of property, and further displacement of vulnerable people because of continued shelling and aerial attacks targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure in many parts of the country, including western Omdurman, Merowe in Northern State, Atbara in River Nile State, and the Darfur region.

In a 7 January statement, then US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the US had determined that the RSF and its allied militias were responsible for committing genocide in Sudan. On the same day, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced sanctions against RSF leader General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (known as Hemeti), as well as seven RSF-owned companies located in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and one individual for their roles in procuring weapons for the RSF.

On 16 January, OFAC also sanctioned the SAF's leader and the head of the Sudanese Transitional Sovereign Council (TSC), General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, along with one company and one individual involved in weapons procurement for the SAF. The same day, a New York Times article, citing US officials, reported that the SAF had used chemical weapons on at least two occasions against the

RSF, which played a key factor in the decision to sanction Burhan. The article further stated that US officials who were briefed on the matter believed the chemical used was likely chlorine gas. However, the exact details of the use of these weapons remain unclear.

Council members have been closely monitoring the food insecurity situation in Sudan. On 6 January, the Council held an open briefing on the 24 December 2024 report of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Famine Review Committee. The report confirmed that famine conditions in the Zamzam camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in North Darfur persisted between October and November 2024 and had spread to other IDP sites in North Darfur, including Al Salam and Abu Shouk camps, as well as the Western Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan State. The report projected famine conditions in five more areas between December 2024 and May, with a confirmed risk of famine in 17 additional areas during the same period. (For background, see our 5 August 2024 and 4 January *What's In Blue* stories.) Sudan's authorisation for the Adre border crossing at the Sudan-Chad border—used by UN humanitarian agencies and their partners for conducting cross-border humanitarian operations—expires in mid-February. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Adre crossing remains the shortest route to deliver humanitarian assistance to Darfur at the scale and speed required.

Efforts to resolve the ongoing conflict continued but without any significant breakthrough. On 18 December 2024, Mauritania hosted the third consultative meeting on enhancing coordination among various peace initiatives on Sudan. Several regional and international interlocutors attended the meeting, including Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Sudan Ramtane Lamamra and representatives of the African Union, the European Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the League of Arab States, Bahrain, Egypt, Mauritania, the US, and Saudi Arabia. In a communiqué adopted following the meeting, the participants agreed on the operational details of a technical task force of the consultative group for the purpose of exchanging information and ensuring harmonisation of efforts.

Lamamra visited Port Sudan from 22–24 December 2024, where he met with senior Sudanese officials, including Burhan, to discuss UN-led peace efforts. During his visit, he also engaged with several senior diplomats from various countries to discuss regional and international support for the peace process. On 25 December 2024, Lamamra travelled to Addis Ababa, where he met with a delegation from the RSF. The discussions focused on implementing the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's 21 October 2024 report for the protection of civilians in Sudan. Among other things, the report recommended that the warring parties establish a robust and transparent compliance mechanism, as a critical step to ensure implementation of the 11 May 2023 Jeddah declaration.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 20 December 2024, the Sudan country office of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released a report on the human rights situation in El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur State, which has been under siege by the RSF and allied Arab militias since May 2024. The

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 Record S/PV.9831](#) (6 January 2025) was a meeting to consider the report of the Famine Review Committee, dated 24 December 2024. [Other S/2024/826](#) (18 November 2024) was a draft resolution, proposed by the UK and Sierra Leone, aiming to advance measures to protect civilians in Sudan.

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report noted that, during this period, more than 782 civilians were killed and 1,143 injured because of intense shelling by the RSF, recurring airstrikes by the SAF, and artillery shelling by both the SAF and allied joint forces. The report also documented repeated RSF attacks on camps hosting IDPs, in particular Zamzam and Abu Shouk. In a press release, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk expressed deep concern over the continuing siege, urged all parties to the conflict to stop attacks on civilians and civilian objects, and called on them to comply with their obligations under international law.

In a 17 January press release, Türk warned that direct and ethnically motivated attacks on civilians were becoming increasingly common amid the ongoing hostilities. Over a two-week period, OHCHR documented at least 21 deaths in the southeastern state of Al Jazira, although the actual number of deaths is likely much higher. The press release cited reports indicating that these attacks were carried out by the Sudan Shield Forces, led by Abu Aqla Keikal, a former RSF commander who defected to the SAF in October 2024. It also raised serious concerns about the situation in North Darfur, where ethnically motivated attacks by the RSF and allied Arab militias against African ethnic groups – particularly the Zaghawa and the Fur – continue to inflict devastating harm.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 23 December 2024, Council members received the final report of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, which had not been published at press time. The report apparently provides an account of various aspects of the conflict, including its dynamics, the financing of the armed groups, the humanitarian impact and violations of international humanitarian law, recruitment patterns of the warring parties, the proliferation of weapons and violations of the sanctions regime, and the conflict's impact on regional security and stability, among other things.

At press time, the appointment of subsidiary body chairs had not been finalised among Council members, preventing the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee from discussing the findings and recommendations of the Panel of Experts' 20 December 2024 final report. As a matter of practice, final reports are published only after being discussed in a committee meeting.

Women, Peace and Security

In a recent update on patterns of gender-based violence (GBV) in the war in Sudan, UN Women reported a 288 percent increase between December 2023 and December 2024 in the number of GBV survivors seeking support services in the country. According to the update, conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) has been perpetrated by all conflict parties and has affected mainly women and girls, but also men and boys. The update noted that ethnic minority groups have been deliberately targeted with rape and other forms of sexual violence and cited reports of attacks against women human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, and humanitarian workers to "silence documentation and reporting of GBV incidents and the scale of atrocities".

The update added that similar deliberate attacks against women health workers and the staff of women-led organisations, which have been "at the forefront of providing services to GBV survivors", have also been observed. It stressed that the lack of "a monitoring, reporting, and accountability mechanism to hold perpetrators to account has meant that violence continues unabated amidst a culture of impunity". It added that this undermines international commitments such as those outlined in Security Council resolution 1820 of 2008 which, among other things, stressed the importance of ending impunity for CRSV as part of a "comprehensive approach to seeking sustainable peace, justice, truth, and national reconciliation".

Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Council in February is renewing the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee. Ensuring strict compliance with the sanctions regime is a related issue. One option for Council members is to extend the panel's mandate for one year.

Some members may suggest extending the panel's mandate until September to align it with the mandate cycle of the sanctions measures and facilitate a broader discussion on the sanctions regime and the panel in September. This was also raised during last year's negotiations on resolution 2725, which most recently extended the panel's mandate. (For background, see our 8 March 2024 *What's In Blue* story.)

Based on the panel's 23 December 2024 report and its recommendations, Council members may wish to have a substantive discussion about the sanctions measures, including, but not limited to, expanding the geographic scope of the sanctions measures to the rest of the country, the designation criteria, and additional listing of individuals and entities under the current regime.

The levels of intercommunal violence and insecurity throughout the country are a major concern. In this regard, the overarching issue for the Security Council remains how to halt the ongoing fighting and support efforts to achieve a sustainable ceasefire across Sudan. As hostilities persist, however, Security Council resolutions remain unimplemented, and mediation efforts have consistently failed to achieve any meaningful breakthroughs. (For background and more information, see the brief on Sudan in our December 2024 *Monthly Forecast*.)

Nonetheless, Council members could consider adopting 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 that the RSF halt its 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 2024 report, and expresses support for establishing a monitoring and verification mechanism in case of a ceasefire and to ensure compliance with the Jeddah declaration.

In addition to Lamamra, the Chinese Presidency in February could consider inviting OCHA to brief on the humanitarian situation in the country and efforts to address the crisis.

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

Council and Wider Dynamics

Despite the underlying differences among Council members, such as on the utility of the sanctions regime, members were able to unanimously adopt resolution 2750 of 11 September 2024, extending the sanctions regime for one year. While members agreed on the necessity of extending the regime, the discussions underscored differing

Sudan

views on how to adapt the Council's tools to Sudan's evolving situation. For instance, France apparently proposed language expressing the Council's intention to consider the relevance of extending sanctions measures to other regions of Sudan. Although some members seem to have been willing to discuss this proposal, the "A3 plus" grouping (Algeria, Sierra Leone, Guyana, and then-Council member Mozambique), China, and Russia strongly objected to it. (For more information, see our 8 March 2024 *What's In Blue* story.)

On the situation in general, critical divisions exist within the Council, shaped by differing priorities and approaches to key issues, including protection of civilians, implementation of ceasefire mechanisms, and addressing accountability for violations of international humanitarian law. Several Council members, such as Algeria, China, Pakistan, and Russia, recognise Sudan's TSC, led by Burhan, as the legitimate authority, which remains responsible for, among other things, protection of civilians and coordinating the delivery of humanitarian aid. Other Council members, such as the US, however, consider both the RSF and SAF to be responsible for the atrocities

being committed in Sudan and unfit to govern. Following the imposition of sanctions on both warring sides, Blinken said that "[t]aken together, these sanctions underscore the US view that neither man is fit to govern a future, peaceful Sudan". (For background and more information, see the brief on Sudan in our November 2024 *Monthly Forecast* and 4 January *What's In Blue* story.)

It remains to be seen whether, under US President Donald Trump's administration, these US policy positions will be maintained. In 2020, Sudan joined the Abraham Accords, normalising ties with Israel, as part of an agreement with the first Trump administration, which involved removing Sudan's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism. Following this, Burhan met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Kampala.

Burhan's relations with the UAE have deteriorated because of the UAE's reported military support for the RSF during the ongoing conflict. Furthermore, in October 2023, Sudan restored diplomatic ties with Iran, which has reportedly been supplying arms to the SAF since the outbreak of hostilities.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council will hold its monthly briefing and consultations on Yemen. UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Tom Fletcher (via videoconference) are expected to brief.

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

Key Recent Developments

The situation in Yemen remains fluid, reflecting recent consequential developments in the Middle East. Following the 19 January Israel-Hamas ceasefire, the Iran-backed Houthi rebel group in Yemen announced that it would limit its attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea to ships with links to Israel, pending the full implementation of all phases of the Gaza ceasefire agreement. Since November 2023, the Houthis have repeatedly attacked ships navigating the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, severely disrupting global maritime trade.

On 22 January, the Houthis released the crew of the MV *Galaxy Leader*, a Japanese-operated ship affiliated with an Israeli businessman. The rebel group detained the vessel and its crew over a year ago, on 19 November 2023, soon after the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. They announced that "the release of the *Galaxy Leader* crew comes within the framework of our solidarity with Gaza and in support of the ceasefire agreement".

The Houthis and Israel have also engaged in frequent hostilities, with Houthi-launched drones and ballistic missiles (most of which have been intercepted) targeting Israeli territory and Israeli airstrikes hitting Houthi sites in Yemen—which have included infrastructure such as Hodeidah port, Sana'a airport, and the Hezyaz power plant. Most recently, on 18 January, the Houthis launched

two ballistic missiles targeting Israel's Defence Ministry in Tel Aviv, which were intercepted by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). These attacks came hours after the hostage release and ceasefire deal in Gaza was approved by the Israeli government.

During his briefing at the Security Council's latest meeting on Yemen on 15 January, Grundberg stressed that the context has become increasingly internationalised and that recent cycles of strikes between the Houthis and Israel have hindered the prospects of peace for Yemen. At that meeting, several Council members condemned Houthi attacks on Israel and called on Israel to safeguard Yemeni civilian infrastructure in its attacks on Houthi targets, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law.

In a subsequent meeting that day, the Security Council adopted resolution 2768, extending until 15 July the monthly requirement for the Secretary-General to report on attacks by the Houthis on merchant and commercial vessels in the Red Sea, initially established by resolution 2722 of 10 January 2024. The resolution was adopted with 12 votes in favour and three abstentions (Algeria, China, and Russia). (For more information, see our 15 January 2025 *What's In Blue* story.)

For over a year, efforts to promote a roadmap under UN auspices and to advance an inclusive political process in Yemen have been paralysed because of the Houthi escalations in the Red Sea and beyond. A truce established in 2022 between the Yemeni government and the Houthis has largely held. However, recent regional tensions have tested the truce's stability and endangered progress towards de-escalation. During the 15 January Council meeting, Grundberg highlighted his extensive diplomatic engagement—including visits in recent weeks to Muscat, Sana'a, Tehran, and Riyadh—aimed at promoting de-escalation, addressing the economic deterioration in

UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2768 (15 January 2025) extended the Secretary-General's monthly reporting requirement on Houthi attacks on merchant and commercial vessels in the Red Sea. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9835 (15 January 2025) was a Council meeting on Yemen.

Yemen

Yemen, facilitating political dialogue, and advancing steps towards a nationwide ceasefire. In the subsequent closed consultations, the Special Envoy apparently informed Council members that the parties remain committed to establishing a roadmap. He stressed, however, that the situation remains challenging and that for peace efforts to be successful, the full support of the international community, including a unified Security Council, is needed.

Meanwhile, Yemen's humanitarian situation remains dire. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' 2025 Yemen Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP), the country's deteriorating economy, the protracted conflict, and crumbling basic services are exacerbating humanitarian needs across the country. An estimated 19.5 million people require humanitarian assistance and protection services in 2025, an increase of 1.3 million people from last year. An estimated \$2.47 billion is required to fulfil the plan outlined by the HNRP and provide humanitarian assistance and protection services to over 10.5 million people.

During the 15 January Council meeting, the briefers and many Council members reiterated their call for the Houthis to release the more than 50 UN, non-governmental organisation, diplomatic mission, and civil society personnel, whom they have detained for over six months. On 24 January, the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Yemen reported that the Houthis had detained seven additional UN personnel and that the UN will consequently be suspending all official movements into and within areas under Houthi control until further notice. The Secretary-General condemned the detention of these seven personnel and demanded their release. On 25 January, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) announced that the Houthis unilaterally released 153 "conflict-related detainees", an act that the Houthis claimed was an effort to ease tensions following the Gaza ceasefire.

Key Issues and Options

Minimising the effects of the destabilising regional tensions on Yemen and reinvigorating the stalled intra-Yemeni political process are overarching priorities for the Council.

Recent major developments in the Middle East, particularly regarding the situation in Gaza, continue to influence discussions on the file. Following the Gaza ceasefire, Council members may choose to concentrate on mobilising pressure for a resumption of Yemeni peace talks and advancing the political process. An option for the Council would be to issue a presidential statement or press statement encouraging the Yemeni parties to resume concrete discussions towards establishing a roadmap under UN auspices.

Council members may also consider focusing attention on the worsening humanitarian situation in the country. There is a sense that the prioritisation of other urgent crises on the Council's agenda has left the Yemen humanitarian situation facing severe funding shortfalls, which the Council may seek to address by encouraging

member states to mobilise funding to meet the requirements of the 2025 HRNP, including through a potential pledging conference.

Council Dynamics

Council members are largely aligned on support for an intra-Yemeni political process, the need to improve humanitarian conditions in Yemen, and on their calls for the Houthis to cease attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea. Many members appear to hope that the ceasefire in Gaza can provide the momentum, conditions, and space for restoring the political process and de-escalating the situation in the Red Sea. It seems that some members may also be inclined to encourage Grundberg to seize the opportunity to advance mediation efforts towards the establishment of a roadmap for inclusive peace in Yemen, especially if the fragile ceasefire in Gaza continues to hold in the coming weeks.

Nevertheless, Council members, particularly the permanent members, have divergent views on what is fuelling the political stalemate and insecurity in Yemen. Russia has been clear that it views Israel's military operations in the Middle East as a core destabilising factor in the region, including for Yemen. It also continues to accuse the UK and the US of undermining security in Yemen through their retaliatory strikes on the Houthis. On the other hand, the P3 members (France, the UK, and the US) have been critical of Iran's role in supporting the Houthis, including militarily. During the 15 January Council meeting, the US stressed that "the time has come to hold Iran to account for enabling the Houthis' long-range missile attacks on international shipping and on Israel". Denmark and the Republic of Korea also stressed the need to strengthen and fully implement the arms embargo on the Houthis established through resolution 2216 of 14 April 2015 to curb the flow of weapons to the group.

It remains to be seen how the new US administration will approach the Yemen file and how that will affect the wider Council dynamics. On 22 January, US President Donald Trump moved to relist the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO). This reverses the decision of the administration of former President Joe Biden to lift this designation because of humanitarian concerns and to support Yemeni peace efforts. An FTO designation authorises sanctions on those who provide the designated group with "material support".

Several Council members also continue to have a significant interest in maritime security and in de-escalating the Red Sea crisis. Three of the Council's new elected members—Denmark, Greece, and Panama—have suffered Houthi attacks on their commercial vessels. During the 15 January Council meeting, Panama highlighted that since the attacks began in November 2023, "there have been 136 attacks on commercial vessels, more than a dozen of them on ships sailing under the Panama flag, including oil tankers".

The UK is the penholder on Yemen.

Multilateralism

Expected Council Action

In February, China plans to convene an open debate on “Practicing Multilateralism, Reforming and Improving Global Governance”, which will be the signature event of its presidency. The meeting will be chaired by China’s Foreign Minister, Wang Yi. UN Secretary-General António Guterres is expected to brief.

No outcome is planned.

Key Recent Developments

Over the past decade, several Council members have chosen to convene signature events during their presidencies that focus on multilateralism. These include, for example, meetings on:

- “Reflect[ing] on history [and] reaffirm[ing] the strong commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the UN”, held by China on 23 February 2015;
- “Strengthening multilateralism and the role of the United Nations”, convened by China on 9 November 2018;
- “Upholding the UN Charter”, initiated by Viet Nam and held on 9 January 2020;
- “Upholding multilateralism and the UN-centred international system”, convened by China on 7 May 2021;
- “New orientation for reformed multilateralism”, convened by India on 14 December 2022;
- “Effective multilateralism through the defence of the principles of the UN Charter”, convened by Russia on 24 April 2023; and
- “Multilateral cooperation in the interest of a more just, democratic and sustainable world order”, held by Russia on 16 July 2024.

Uncharacteristically for a Council meeting, there were no briefers at the most recent of these meetings in July 2024. However, Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov commenced the meeting with a statement in which he asserted that international law—including the UN Charter and Security Council resolutions—are “interpreted by the collective West in a perverse and selective manner”. Lavrov similarly claimed that the “notorious rules-based international order” is designed to serve Washington’s interests, representing a threat to multilateralism.

In September 2024, world leaders adopted the Pact for the Future. The document, agreed through intergovernmental negotiations led by Germany and Namibia, is meant to adapt international cooperation and institutions to today’s realities and the challenges of the future. In one section on “Transforming Global Governance”, member states commit to “action to strengthen and reinvigorate multilateralism and deepen international cooperation”. They resolve to make the multilateral system more “just, democratic, equitable and representative of today’s world” by giving all member states, especially those from the developing world, a greater voice in global decision-making. In this regard, they call for structural reform of the Security Council with greater representation “of... underrepresented and unrepresented regions and groups”, including the Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and especially Africa. Further, they commit to reforming the international financial architecture

to enhance the representation of developing countries and garner enhanced funds to support sustainable development goals.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue is how to utilise the open debate to generate concrete ideas for strengthening the multilateral system with the Security Council at the centre of its peace and security architecture. At a time of shifting power dynamics and different approaches to global governance institutions between the global north and south, there is a need to come to a common understanding of how to address the evolving nature of conflict and its impact on the multilateral system.

In order to do so, Council members may need to focus on ways of building greater trust. As the Secretary-General noted in *A New Agenda for Peace*—his July 2023 policy paper presenting ideas for member states to prevent conflict and advance peace—the lack of trust and cooperation among member states, including the major powers, is a key obstacle to a more peaceful international system. In this regard, it might be helpful if the permanent members of the Security Council met more regularly on an informal level to reduce tensions among themselves. They could also hold more frequent meetings with the Secretary-General. While the Secretary-General meets monthly with the elected members, the meetings with the permanent members appear to have dwindled in recent years. More informal meetings among all 15 members (for example, using the “sofa talks” format) could also help build trust.

Although different views on multilateralism in the Council may be an obstacle, an option for the Council would be to consider a presidential statement that:

- Affirms the centrality of the UN Charter in international law and urges member states to adhere to its norms and principles;
- Urges member states to resolve their disputes peacefully, drawing on tools such as negotiations, mediation, conciliations (among others) outlined in Article 33 of the Charter; and
- Encourages efforts to find common ground with respect to the use of long-standing Council tools such as peace operations and sanctions.

An additional option could be for China to produce a chair’s summary capturing the major themes of the open debate.

Council Dynamics

The theme of this open debate is reminiscent of signature events that China has convened during some of its previous Council presidencies, including in February 2015, November 2018 and May 2021. It comes at a time of significant geo-political tension among the major powers, and the recent return to the US presidency of Donald Trump, who has already announced the withdrawal of the US from the World Health Organization and the Paris Agreement since assuming office on 20 January.

Contrasting views regarding the nature of the multilateral system, how it functions, and which countries adhere to the values of the UN Charter are likely to be on display during the open debate. In

UN DOCUMENTS ON MULTILATERALISM Security Council Meetings S/PV.9686 (16 July 2024) was an open debate on “Multilateral cooperation in the interest of a more just, democratic and sustainable world order”. S/PV.9308 (24 April 2023) was an open debate on “Effective multilateralism through the defence of the principles of the UN Charter”. S/PV.9220 (14 December 2022) was an open debate on “New orientation for reformed multilateralism”. S/2021/456 (7 May 2021) was a high-level briefing held via videoconference on “Upholding multilateralism and the UN-centred international system”. S/PV.8699 (9 January 2020) was an open debate initiated by Viet Nam on “Upholding the UN Charter”. S/PV.8395 (9 November 2018) was an open debate convened by China on “Strengthening multilateralism and the role of the United Nations”. S/PV.7389 (23 February 2015) was an open debate initiated by China on “Reflect[ing] on history [and] reaffirm[ing] the strong commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the UN”.

Multilateralism

this regard, China and Russia have maintained that the “rules-based international order” to which Western countries refer is a façade for the selfish pursuit of their strategic interests. They maintain that the US and other Western states adhere to international law only when it is convenient and beneficial for them to do so. At the same time, many member states continue to see Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing conflict there as a violation of a core tenet of the UN Charter, the prohibition of the use of force against the territorial integrity of states, as outlined in Article 2 (4).

Members also have different perspectives on the use of some of the Council’s tools, including peacekeeping and sanctions. China and Russia tend to emphasise the importance of extending state authority and promoting security sector reform in peacekeeping mandates. While valuing the importance of these issues, several other members highlight women’s participation in peace processes, the relationship between climate change and security, and the promotion

of human rights in peacekeeping mandates.

The sanctions divide is particularly stark between Western countries, on the one hand, and China, Russia, and African countries, on the other. Western countries often maintain that UN arms embargoes and targeted sanctions, such as assets freezes and travel bans, are vital tools in mitigating violence and supporting the implementation of peace agreements. While China, Russia, and the Council’s African members recognise that sanctions can be a useful Council tool, they often argue that sanctions are employed in a punitive, unconstructive manner and that they are insufficiently adjusted to account for progress on the ground. Furthermore, China and Russia have been highly critical of the use of unilateral sanctions—that is, economic measures imposed by one state or group of states to compel a policy change in another state, including through national sanctions regimes.

Libya

Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council will hold its bimonthly briefing on the situation in Libya. A UN representative is expected to brief the Council on recent political, security, and humanitarian developments in the country. Additionally, the chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee might brief on the committee’s activities. (At the time of writing, the chair had not yet been appointed as Council members continue to negotiate this year’s allocation of subsidiary bodies).

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 one of the root causes of Libya’s political, security, and economic instability.

In a 15 December 2024 statement, Deputy Special Representative and Political Officer in Charge of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Stephanie Koury announced a new UNSMIL-facilitated process aimed at ending the political deadlock and

facilitating the holding of elections. According to the statement, this process will comprise two stages. First, UNSMIL intends to convene a technical committee of Libyan experts to develop options to overcome “contentious issues” in the electoral laws and hold elections “in the shortest possible time including with proposed guarantees, assurances and a timeframe”. Second, the mission will facilitate a national dialogue to “expand consensus” for the resolution of long-standing drivers of conflict. The dialogue will include all segments of Libyan society, including political parties, women, youth, social leaders, and “cultural components”. In her 16 December 2024 bimonthly Council briefing, Koury reiterated the details of this initiative.

Since then, Koury has continued consulting with Libyan stakeholders on the implementation of the proposal, including with HoR Speaker Aguila Saleh, HoR Deputy Speaker Fawzi Al Nuwairi, and GNU National Security Advisor Ibrahim Bushnaf. Additionally, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo met with acting GNU Foreign Minister Eltaher Elbaour on 21 January in New York to discuss the facilitation process.

On 19 January, Libya’s High National Elections Commission (HNEC) announced the beginning of the second phase of the country’s municipal elections. This process will culminate in the election of local governing councils for 63 municipalities, starting with a 21-day candidate registration period and a subsequent voter registration period to be scheduled later. HNEC’s announcement followed the successful completion of the first phase of municipal elections on 16 November 2024, which conducted polls for 58 local councils. In his most recent report on UNSMIL, dated 10 December 2024 and covering developments since 9 August 2024, the Secretary-General welcomed the municipal elections as “an important basis for the implementation of a national electoral process once a political

UN DOCUMENTS ON LIBYA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2769 (16 January 2025) renewed the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee until 15 May 2026 and the authorisation of measures related to the illicit export of petroleum from Libya until 1 May 2026. S/RES/2755 (31 October 2024) 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. [Secretary-General’s Report S/2024/895](#) (10 December 2024) was the 120-day report on UNSMIL.

settlement on an implementable legal framework is reached”.

Through resolution 2755 of 31 October 2024, the Council extended UNSMIL’s mandate for three months, until 31 January, with a “further automatic extension” of an additional nine months, until 31 October, if a new Special Representative and Head of UNSMIL is appointed by 31 January. (The leadership position had been vacant since then-Special Representative Abdoulaye Bathily stepped down in May 2024.) On 9 January, Council members held closed consultations at Russia’s request to receive an update from DiCarlo on the appointment process. On the day of the meeting, Council members apparently received a letter from the Secretary-General expressing his intention to appoint Hanna Serwaa Tetteh of Ghana, who most recently served as the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa. Following additional informal discussions among members, the Council agreed to Tetteh’s nomination on 24 January, after which the Secretary-General officially announced her appointment, triggering the automatic extension of UNSMIL’s mandate on 31 January. At the time of writing, it was unclear when Tetteh would officially assume her position, and the UN representative to brief at February’s Council meeting was not yet confirmed.

On 16 January, the Council adopted resolution 2769, renewing the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee until 15 May 2026 and the authorisation of measures related to the illicit export of petroleum from Libya until 1 May 2026. The resolution also included modifications of the arms embargo and assets freeze measures imposed by resolution 1970 of 26 February 2011. (For more information, see our 16 January *What’s In Blue* story).

Key Issues and Options

Supporting political momentum towards national elections to unify Libya’s divided government remains a key issue for the 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.

In this regard, February’s briefing will provide Council members with an opportunity to learn about preparations for and the implementation of UNSMIL’s revitalised efforts to facilitate dialogue between Libyan political stakeholders. The potential impact of the mission’s leadership transition on this initiative is also likely to be of interest to members.

To demonstrate the Council’s continued support for the mission’s intensified engagement under Tetteh’s leadership, members could consider issuing a presidential statement or press statement. They

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

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.

However, the recent extension of UNSMIL’s mandate in the absence of a Special Representative rekindled older disagreements. 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, the Council renewed UNSMIL’s mandate five times between September 2021 and July 2022 through short-term extensions, in part because Russia opposed a regular one-year renewal in the absence of appointed mission leadership. During negotiations on last year’s renewal under similar circumstances, Russia again opposed a one-year extension, citing 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 would be automatically extended by an additional nine months upon the appointment of a new Special Representative.

After the Secretary-General informed Council members of his intention to appoint Tetteh, Russia initially signalled scepticism about her nomination. In a letter dated 10 January, Russia expressed concerns about the nomination process—including a lack of consultation with Council members and the short notice with which the nomination was announced—and requested a list of all other candidates considered for the position in order to inform the Council’s deliberations on the matter. After further consultations with the UN Secretariat, however, it seems that Russia accepted Tetteh’s nomination.

More broadly, geopolitical tensions influence Council dynamics with respect to Libya. Several Western members remain concerned about Russia’s growing presence in the eastern part of the country under Haftar’s control, which has reportedly accelerated as Russia has transferred military assets from Syria following the ouster of former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. For its part, Russia routinely blames Libya’s current instability on the NATO-led military intervention in 2011 and accuses Western countries of seeking to exploit Libya’s oil reserves for economic gain.

The UK is the penholder on Libya.

Central African Republic

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

On 14 November 2024, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2759, extending MINUSCA's mandate for another year until 15 November. This was the first unanimous adoption of a resolution renewing MINUSCA's mandate in four years. (For more information, see our 13 November *What's in Blue* story.)

Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix visited the CAR from 16 to 20 December 2024 following the adoption of resolution 2759. During his visit, he met with CAR authorities, including the president and the prime minister, other national and local authorities, representatives of political parties, and members of civil society. His discussions with the CAR authorities were largely focused on the implementation of MINUSCA's mandate. He also visited Bambari, the capital of the Ouaka prefecture, to assess the situation on the ground. In his press briefing at the conclusion of his visit, he acknowledged the encouraging progress in the CAR, including the expansion of state authority, despite the many challenges that remain.

The CAR is expected to hold local and national elections this year. MINUSCA is expected to support the CAR authorities in organising these elections, in accordance with resolution 2759. With a budget shortfall posing a major challenge, local elections have been postponed several times and are now scheduled for July. Only \$4.8 million out of the \$14.8 million needed to organise the elections had been appropriated as at 11 October 2024, the date of the Secretary-General's latest report on MINUSCA. The National Elections Authority reportedly conducted biometric voter registration in November and December last year despite logistical and security constraints. The CAR will be holding local elections for the first time in four decades, but opposition and civil society groups have been calling for a boycott of the elections, raising several concerns about the fairness and inclusivity of the process.

Following the 2023 constitutional referendum in the CAR, which removed the presidential term limits, the country is also expected to hold presidential and legislative elections in 2025–2026. President Faustin Touadéra is likely to seek a third term. However, concerns about the shrinking civic space continue to be an ongoing issue. In his October 2024 report, the Secretary-General called on the CAR authorities to engage in dialogue with the opposition to facilitate the holding of peaceful, inclusive and transparent elections. Apparently, Lacroix also discussed the elections with the authorities during his recent visit to the CAR.

The security situation has remained volatile, particularly in the northwest and east, because of competition over natural resources and control of major road axes. Civilians continue to bear the brunt of instability in the country, and the use of explosive ordnance remains

an ongoing challenge. Various armed groups are also involved in kidnapping for ransom. According to a 15 January MINUSCA press release, the mission deployed its peacekeepers in the Basse-Kotto prefecture at the request of the CAR government following the deterioration of the security situation in the area. The country's porous borders remain a significant security threat, facilitating the movement of armed groups and illicit arms trafficking. The Secretary-General's October 2024 report states that the CAR government is working to enhance cooperation with neighbouring countries to tackle these challenges.

After 11 years, the Kimberley Process—a multilateral trade regime established in 2003 to prevent the flow of conflict diamonds—lifted its suspension of diamond exports from the CAR on 15 November 2024. This decision followed a visit by a Kimberley Process monitoring team to the CAR from 9 to 15 September 2024 at the request of the CAR government, which had been calling for the suspension to be lifted. During the visit, the monitoring team assessed the security situation and the mechanisms in place in accordance with the Kimberley Process. The CAR government welcomed the decision, which was announced during the Kimberley Process plenary meeting held in Dubai from 12 to 14 November 2024, but others appeared cautious in light of the ongoing competition by armed groups for control over gold and diamond mining sites.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 7 January, the Independent Expert on the human rights situation in the CAR, Yao Agbetse, welcomed the adoption of new legislation that protects human rights defenders in the country. Adopted by the National Assembly on 27 December 2024, it provides enhanced protection measures for human rights defenders, including security mechanisms, legal support and guarantees against reprisals. The new legislation intends to strengthen civil society organisations' contribution to the implementation and monitoring of sectoral programmes, the National Human Rights Policy, and the National Development Plan. Agbetse underscored that “this legislation is a step in the right direction towards a more just and equitable society, and it will safeguard freedom of expression, association, assembly and peaceful demonstration, and protect civic space in the country”. To that end, Agbetse pledged to work closely with the authorities to ensure the law's implementation and “invited the state authorities, the National Commission for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and technical and financial partners to provide long-term support for civil society organisations and human rights defenders”.

Women, Peace and Security

In an update on the situation of women in the CAR, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security stressed that violence and insecurity persist in the country, driven by “continued impunity for serious crimes”. The update says that, while women and girls continue to be subjected to sexual and gender-based violence, there is a persistent lack of access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, psychosocial and legal support and other services. It also says that women human rights defenders and peacebuilders face an “increasingly restricted civic space”. The update notes that the situation in the CAR is impacted by other conflicts in the region, such as the war in Sudan, which has displaced over 35,000 people into the CAR, 83 percent of whom are women and children. Among other recommendations, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security called on the CAR authorities to take measures to ensure the effective promotion and protection of civic space.

Key Issues and Options

The upcoming local and national elections in the CAR will be a key

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE CAR Security Council Resolution S/RES/2759 (14 November 2024) renewed MINUSCA's mandate for one year until 15 November 2025. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9783](#) (14 November 2024) was on the situation in the CAR.

Central African Republic

issue for Council members this year. Members will likely be interested in following the state of preparation for the elections closely. An option for the Council is to have an outcome at the appropriate time reiterating its call for the CAR authorities to create the necessary conditions for the holding of free, transparent and inclusive elections by opening civic space for the participation of all sections of society, including women and youth. Council members could also seek perspectives from the field to gain a better understanding of the current situation regarding the upcoming elections in an informal setting.

The implementation of MINUSCA's mandate pursuant to resolution 2759 is another key issue for Council members. Members may wish to have Rugwabiza provide more details on the roadmap developed by the mission to implement its mandate during the meeting in February.

Additionally, the security, humanitarian and human rights situations in the CAR are likely to continue to be of major concern for Council members. The movement of armed groups across CAR's porous borders and the illicit trafficking of arms are related concerns. During the briefing in February, Council members may reiterate their concerns and welcome the National Assembly's adoption of a law on the protection of human rights defenders on 27 December 2024. They may also welcome the establishment of a border post in Bémberé, a village in the Lim-Pendé Prefecture along the border between CAR and Chad, on 17 January.

Council and Wider Dynamics

The unanimous adoption of a MINUSCA mandate renewal for the first time in four years in November signalled the Council's support for MINUSCA's work. The CAR's improved bilateral relationship with the penholder, France, appears to have contributed to a more constructive mandate renewal negotiation process. It seems that the

CAR has been trying to mend its relations with Western partners to ease its economic difficulties, which appears to have contributed to the resumption of bilateral and multilateral support. At the same time, it has continued its security cooperation with Russia. President Touadéra was reportedly in Moscow in January for a five-day official visit, during which he met with President Vladimir Putin to discuss bilateral cooperation, including security, and multilateral cooperation at the UN.

Although Russia voted in favour of resolution 2759, in its explanation of vote, it expressed opposition to references to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the resolution, reiterating its position on the ICC as an "embodiment of double standards" and a "political instrument that has nothing to do with justice". In March 2023, the ICC issued arrest warrants for Putin and Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova. Russia also opposed references in the resolution to the internal documents of the Secretariat on the environment and called on Council members not to "mix up the key provisions of the mandate...with subjects that are not directly under the remit of the Security Council". (The document was the UN Department of Operational Support's "Way Forward: Environment Strategy for Peace Operations 2023–2030".)

China had proposed language in the negotiations on resolution 2759 calling on MINUSCA to adopt a transition mindset based on the recommendations of the mission's strategic review, which was conducted last year; however, this language was not accepted in deference to the CAR, which apparently did not want the Council to consider the recommendations contained in the review. In its explanation of vote, China expressed disappointment, maintaining that "reasonable viewpoints raised by some Council members during the consultations were not taken on board".

France is the penholder on the CAR.

DPRK (North Korea)

Expected Council Action

In February, Security Council members are scheduled to discuss the 90-day report on the work of the 1718 Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Sanctions Committee in closed consultations.

Ordinarily, the Chair of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee briefs Council members on the report. At the time of writing, the Chair had not yet been appointed as Council members continue to negotiate this year's allocation of subsidiary bodies. If the Chair is not appointed before the end of February, then the meeting may be postponed.

Key Recent Developments

The DPRK has continued to carry out missile tests in recent months. On 31 October 2024, it announced that it had tested a new solid-fuel "Hwasong-19" intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and claimed that it flew higher than any of its previous missiles. According to Japanese officials, the missile flew for approximately 86 minutes and reached a possible altitude of 7,000 kilometres before falling into the

Sea of Japan. The launch, which took place just days before the US presidential election, was the country's first ICBM test since December 2023. On 4 November 2024, Council members convened for an open briefing to discuss the test, following a request from France, Japan, Malta, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Slovenia, the UK, and the US. Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Mohamed Khaled Khiari briefed. The US, the penholder on the DPRK, proposed a draft press statement in connection with this meeting, which was opposed by China and Russia.

On 7 January, DPRK state media reported that the DPRK had launched an "intermediate-range hypersonic missile". The test took place while then-US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was in Seoul for a meeting with ROK Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul. Although these reports claimed that the missile travelled approximately 1,500 kilometres at 12 times the speed of sound before descending to a second peak and reaching its target, ROK officials later said that they were likely exaggerated. Council members discussed the test during an open briefing on 8 January. The meeting was requested by France,

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DPRK Sanctions Committee Document S/2024/215 (7 March 2024) was the final report of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee.

DPRK (North Korea)

Denmark, the ROK, Slovenia, the UK, and the US, and members received a briefing from Khiari.

The DPRK has also recently conducted tests of short-range missiles, including on 14 January, when it fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles into waters off its east coast.

In addition to carrying out several missile tests in recent months, the DPRK has ramped up its rhetoric against the US and its allies in the region. During the most recent plenary meeting of the Workers' Party of Korea, which took place in late December 2024, Kim Jong-un reportedly promised to introduce the DPRK's "toughest" US strategy and described the partnership between Japan, the ROK, and the US as a "nuclear military bloc".

On 29 January, DPRK state media reported that Kim Jong-un had inspected nuclear facilities in the country and called for bolstering its nuclear capability.

Against this backdrop, reports regarding the deployment of DPRK troops to the Kursk region in Russia have continued to emerge. On 13 January, ROK lawmakers told reporters that approximately 300 DPRK troops had been killed and about 2,700 injured while fighting Ukrainian soldiers. Two days earlier, on 11 January, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced that Ukraine had captured DPRK soldiers in Kursk for the first time. Both US and ROK officials have also told reporters that they believe the DPRK is preparing to send more troops to Russia in the coming months. On 30 January, however, media outlets reported that DPRK troops had been withdrawn from the frontline in Kursk after suffering heavy casualties. In addition, Ukrainian officials have publicly claimed that the DPRK has continued to send weapons to Russia and said that they expect it will continue doing so.

The increasingly close ties between the DPRK and Russia appear to have prompted both Japan and the ROK to explore options for strengthening their ties with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). From 14 to 16 January, NATO Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy Boris Ruge met with senior officials in Seoul and Tokyo. The day before Ruge met with Japanese officials, Japan announced the inauguration of an independent mission to NATO in Brussels.

On 20 January, newly inaugurated US President Donald Trump reportedly referred to the DPRK as a "nuclear power", days after his Secretary of Defense nominee Peter Hegseth (who has since been confirmed by the US Senate) used the same term in a written response to questions from the US Senate Armed Services Committee. According to media reports, on 21 January, a spokesperson for the ROK foreign ministry issued a statement saying that the DPRK "can never be recognised as a nuclear-armed state" and that "denuclearisation remains a consistent principle upheld by the international community, including [the ROK] and the US".

In a 24 January interview, Trump appeared to suggest that he would attempt to rekindle the direct diplomacy with Kim Jong-un that he pursued during his first term, reportedly telling Fox News that he plans to "reach out" to the DPRK leader and saying, "he liked me and I got along with him".

Key Issues and Options

The reported deployment of DPRK troops on Russian territory,

together with reports of ongoing arms transfers from the DPRK to Russia, has created a major issue for Council members. As more information comes to light, the Council could choose to hold a meeting to discuss relevant developments. Given the direct involvement of a permanent member, a more substantive response is likely to be difficult.

The expiry of the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee is another major issue for the Council. (For more information on the expiration of the Panel's mandate, see our 22 March 2024 *What's in Blue* story). Members are currently considering how the Multilateral Sanctions Monitoring Team, which was first announced on 16 October 2024, could assist both the Council and the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee. Council members could request a briefing on the work of this mechanism once it is operational, either at the Council or Committee level, including in relation to any information it obtains regarding apparent violations of the 1718 DPRK sanctions regime. Members could also ask for a briefing in an informal format, such as a closed-Arria meeting.

The DPRK's weapons tests, many of which violate Council resolutions, are also a serious issue for Council members. Sanctions evasion is another important issue, as is the overall effectiveness of the sanctions regime, particularly given that the DPRK is widely believed to have continued to develop nuclear weapons since the regime was first introduced. The DPRK's ongoing refusal to engage in denuclearisation dialogue and the country's humanitarian situation are also problems for the Council.

The Council could adopt a product that condemns the DPRK's ongoing missile tests, urges member states to comply with existing resolutions, and calls on the DPRK to return to the negotiating table. It could also update and strengthen the 1718 DPRK sanctions regime to exert further pressure on the DPRK.

Council Dynamics

The Council is deeply divided over the DPRK, and this dynamic appears to have worsened as the DPRK and Russia have sought to bolster their ties. The P3 (France, the UK, and the US) and other like-minded countries, including the ROK, generally favour using sanctions to help manage the threat posed by the DPRK and regularly call on member states to comply with existing Council resolutions. Many of these members have urged the DPRK to engage in dialogue and abandon its weapons programmes, while emphasising that it is responsible for escalating tensions. Some of these members have called for the Council to show unity and respond to the DPRK's weapons tests and argue that China and Russia have emboldened the DPRK by blocking Council action on the file. They have also highlighted evidence of arms transfers between the DPRK and Russia and noted that these transfers violate Council resolutions.

China and Russia, on the other hand, blame the US for heightening tensions and have accused it of not doing enough to incentivise the DPRK to participate in denuclearisation talks. These two members have also contended that sanctions should be eased because of their impact on the humanitarian situation and have expressed their support for a draft resolution circulated by China in October 2021 that would provide sanctions relief to the DPRK if adopted.

The US is the penholder on the DPRK.

Somalia

Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council is expected to renew the 2713 Al-Shabaab sanctions regime, including the provision for maritime interdiction, which expires on 28 February.

In addition, the Council will decide on the mandate of the Panel of Experts (PoE) supporting the 2713 Al-Shabaab Sanctions Committee, which was last renewed by resolution 2762 of 13 December 2024 and is set to expire on 31 March. The resolution expressed the Council's intention to review the Panel's mandate and take appropriate actions regarding its further extension by 28 February.

Key Recent Developments

On 27 December, the Council adopted resolution 2767, endorsing the decision of the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) to replace the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) with the AU Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM). The resolution authorised AU members to take all necessary measures in this regard for 12 months, beginning 1 January. It also authorised AU members to deploy up to 12,626 uniformed personnel, including 1,040 police personnel, to AUSSOM until 30 June, and to complete by this date the realignment of all AU troops from ATMIS to AUSSOM. (For more information, see our 26 December 2024 *What's in Blue* story.)

It appears that the AU Commission (the organisation's secretariat) decided to extend the tour of duty of the military and civilian personnel deployed as part of ATMIS until 31 March 2025, citing the need to prevent a security vacuum and preserve institutional memory. Although Somalia had announced the finalisation of consultations with Troop-Contributing Countries (TCCs) participating in AUSSOM in November 2024, recent developments appear to have complicated the process.

Tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia, which had escalated last year after Ethiopia signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Somaliland—a breakaway region in northern Somalia—appear to be subsiding. The agreement reportedly provided Ethiopia, a landlocked country, with access to the Gulf of Aden in exchange for formal recognition of Somaliland. Türkiye's mediation efforts resulted in a breakthrough, culminating in the signing of the Ankara Declaration by the leaders of Ethiopia and Somalia on 11 December 2024. Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to each other's sovereignty, unity, independence, and territorial integrity. They agreed to finalise commercial arrangements through bilateral agreements, granting Ethiopia access to the sea under Somalia's sovereign authority. To this end, they decided to initiate technical negotiations by the end of February, with Türkiye's facilitation, aiming for completion and signing within four months. (For background and more information, see the brief on Somalia in our December 2024 *Monthly Forecast*.)

On 11 January, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud travelled to Addis Ababa for talks with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. In a communiqué adopted following the meeting, both sides agreed to restore and enhance their bilateral ties and for the

respective security agencies to bolster cooperation against threats posed by extremist militant groups and promote regional peace and security. Media reports quoted Somali Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ali Omar Balcad as saying that the primary obstacle to Ethiopia's participation in AUSSOM, pertaining to the MoU agreement, has been resolved. However, he noted the challenge in reallocating the number of troops assigned to AUSSOM, which had been distributed to other TCCs.

This issue also appears to have affected Burundi, one of the major TCCs. In late December 2024, Somalia's Defense Ministry announced that no consensus had been reached on troop allocations for the Burundi National Defense Forces (BNDF) in AUSSOM, expressing regret over the BNDF's decision not to participate in the mission.

Meanwhile, Somalia has been strengthening military ties with Egypt, which has offered to contribute to AUSSOM. Following the signing of a defence cooperation agreement in August 2024, Egypt has provided military support to Somalia, including heavy weaponry, on multiple occasions. On 26 January, Somalia and Egypt concluded technical discussions on Egypt's participation in the mission; however, specific details remain undisclosed.

On 11 January, the foreign ministers of Egypt, Eritrea, and Somalia met in Cairo for a tripartite summit, following up on the Asmara Summit held on 10 October 2024 at the heads of state level. The discussions, among other things, highlighted the importance of strategic partnerships to enhance security and stability in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region, while also addressing the regional impact of the situation in Sudan. During the press conference following the meeting, Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty reportedly said that the security of the Red Sea is the sole responsibility of its coastal nations, emphasising that any presence of non-littoral states, whether military, naval, or otherwise, is unacceptable.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant faction in Somalia (ISIL-Somalia) gaining a foothold in Somalia has been a matter of growing concern, a development reflected in past reports of the Secretary-General on the threats posed by the group. In recent weeks, Puntland forces have intensified military offensives against ISIL-Somalia in the Bari region of north-eastern Somalia. These operations reportedly have resulted in significant territorial gains, successfully driving the group out of its stronghold areas. Media reports indicate that Puntland forces have successfully neutralised numerous ISIL-Somalia militants, though casualties have also been reported among Puntland troops. At the same time, clashes have also been reported between Somali forces and Al-Shabaab, a terrorist group affiliated with Al-Qaida, in the Galgaduud and Hiran regions.

Sanctions-Related Developments

The PoE assisting the 2713 Al-Shabaab Sanctions Committee submitted its final report on 15 October. The report said that Al-Shabaab remains the most significant threat to the peace and security of Somalia, with the capacity to carry out complex attacks against the Somali government, AU forces, and international forces. The report highlighted that the key sources of

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOMALIA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2767 (27 December 2024) endorsed the decision of the AU Peace and Security Council to replace the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) with the AU Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), beginning 1 January 2025. 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/2025/35** (15 January 2025) was the letter from the Secretary-General regarding the appointment of the Panel of Experts assisting the 2713 Al-Shabaab Sanctions Committee. **Sanctions Committee Document S/2024/748** (28 October 2024) was the final report of the Panel of Experts assisting the 2713 Al-Shabaab sanctions committee. S/2024/751 (15 October 2024) was the progress report on the benchmarks set out in the 15 September 2022 technical assessment report.

Somalia

resupply for Al-Shabaab are the group's overrunning of the Somali National Army and ATMIS bases and the diversion of weapons from these bases, spillovers from regional conflicts, and illicit trafficking networks.

The report acknowledged a significant shift in the strength and disposition of ISIL-Somalia. It noted that the group, led by a cadre of former Al-Shabaab militants based in the Bari region of Puntland, has recently seen an influx of foreign fighters, which has expanded and enhanced the group's capabilities against Al-Shabaab. The report estimated that the group has likely doubled in size, partly due to the influx of foreign fighters, with current estimates placing the group's size between 600 and 700 fighters. Additionally, the report highlighted an increase in piracy incidents, with more than 25 attacks, including hijackings, reported on commercial vessels and dhows since 24 November 2023. (For more information, see our 12 December 2024 *What's in Blue* story.)

On 15 October, the Secretary-General submitted a report pursuant to resolution 2713 providing an update on progress in achieving the indicators outlined in the ten benchmarks contained in his 15 September 2022 technical assessment report on Somalia's weapons and ammunition capacity. The 15 October report indicated that progress had been incremental at the federal government level. It also 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. The report added that countering the illicit flow of arms and ammunition into Somalia also remains a critical issue. Another challenge is to apply the weapons and ammunition management frameworks to the weapons held by clan militias, "community defence forces", and civilians.

Key Issues and Options

One of the key issues for Council members in February is the extension of the 2713 Al-Shabaab sanctions regime and the mandate renewal of the PoE supporting the committee. In extending the sanctions measures and renewing the Panel's mandate, Council members are likely to be guided by the findings of the 15 October progress report and the recommendations contained in the Panel's 15 October final report.

In December, Council members agreed on a short-term technical extension of the measures and the Panel's mandate. This approach, proposed by the penholder (the UK), apparently intended to allow the Council the necessary time to hold detailed and structured discussions on the issue, considering the Council's focus on post-ATMIS security arrangement negotiations and the need to delink both discussions. (For more information, see our 12 December 2024 *What's in Blue* story.)

One option for Council members would be to renew the measures outlined in resolution 2713 and extend the mandate of the Panel of Experts for another year. Some Council members may wish to have a substantive discussion about the sanction's measures, including, but not limited to, the scope of the measures, exemptions, and reporting and notification requirements. Resolution 2713 affirmed the Council's commitment to reviewing the procedures outlined in the resolution regarding exemptions and notifications, including through potential modification, suspension, or lifting of the measures.

Council Dynamics

Council members support the Somali government's priorities and recognise the many challenges the country faces, including the persistent insecurity caused by the terrorist activities of Al-Shabaab. They also support ongoing efforts to fight the group, including the implementation of sanctions to degrade Al-Shabaab. In December 2023, Council members were united in their decision to lift the arms embargo on the Somali government, including the provision for advance notification by the Somali government of any deliveries of weapons and military equipment to Somali security and police institutions. At the same time, resolution 2713 reflected a clear focus on countering the threat posed by Al-Shabaab. (For background, see our 1 December 2023 *What's in Blue* story.)

During the negotiations on resolution 2762, Russia apparently expressed reservations about extending the term of the Panel's current membership. It suggested that the composition of the Panel could be decided by mid-January, when the mandate of the PoE's current membership was supposed to end pursuant to resolution 2713.

Earlier this year, the Council members agreed on the composition of the Panel of Experts, as appointed subsequently by the Secretary-General via a letter dated 15 January. However at press time, discussions on the future of the sanctions measures and the panel's mandate appear to be ongoing behind the scenes. Somalia, which has strongly advocated national ownership in recent years and joined the Security Council as a non-permanent member for the 2025-26 term, is well-positioned to push for adjustments to the sanctions regime that align with its national priorities. However, it remains uncertain how these discussions will evolve and influence the dynamics within the Council.

UN Peacekeeping

Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council will receive its annual briefing from the heads of police components of UN peace operations.

Key Recent Developments

Annual briefings by the heads of police components of UN peace operations began in 2014. The last briefing took place in November 2023, with a focus on how the UN Police (UNPOL) can contribute to the implementation of the recommendations in A New

Agenda for Peace, a policy brief released in July 2023 outlining the Secretary-General's vision for the UN's work on peace and security in a changing world. Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Police Commissioner of the UN Multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) Christophe Bizimungu, Police Commissioner of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Christine Fossen, UN Police Adviser Faisal Shahkar, and then-Executive Director of Security Council Report Karin Landgren briefed the Council. (For

UN DOCUMENTS ON PEACEKEEPING Security Council Resolution S/RES/2185 (20 November 2014) was the first stand-alone resolution on UN policing to make policing an integral part of the mandates of UN peacekeeping operations and Special Political Missions. **Security Council Meeting Record** S/PV. 9475 (14 November 2023) was a briefing on UN policing.

UN Peacekeeping

more, see our 13 November 2023 *What's In Blue* story.)

Ghana hosted the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial in Accra on 5-6 December 2023, during which 33 member states made pledges of over 110 new military and police units to UN peacekeeping, according to a press release issued at the conclusion of the meeting. Germany will host the 2025 peacekeeping ministerial in May, which will provide an opportunity for member states to make pledges to support UNPOL, including through the deployment of formed police units and individual police officers and by providing training and technology.

The fourth UN Chiefs of Police Summit (UNCOPS 2024), a biennial event bringing together Ministers, Chiefs of Police, and senior representatives of regional and professional policing organisations, was held in New York from 26 to 27 June 2024, with the theme of “Advancing our Common Security: UN Policing for a New Era”. Participants discussed the role of UNPOL in supporting the Secretary-General’s Action for Peacekeeping (A4P), *A New Agenda for Peace*, and the digital transformation of peacekeeping, among other subjects. Speaking at the summit’s opening session, Lacroix illustrated UNPOL’s work in advancing political solutions and supporting sustainable peace as part of the Secretary-General’s A4P initiative by providing examples of its operations in the field to assist national police with training and public order management. He also described UNPOL’s challenging operating environment, including the growing threats posed by terrorists, transnational organised criminals, armed groups, and cyber criminals, as well as the rise of hate speech, misinformation and disinformation.

In an article published in the UN Chronicle to mark the International Day of Police Cooperation, Shahkar noted that UN Police is “a critical building block of the New Agenda for Peace and its new vision for the rule of law”. The Secretary-General presented his *New Vision for the Rule of Law* in August 2023 as part of efforts to advance Our Common Agenda, his broader vision for the future of global cooperation. Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed, who spoke at the introduction of an event on this new vision in Geneva on 4 August 2023, described the document as “a lodestar for rule of law in the UN system...to be better prepared to provide technical assistance, build capacity and help Member States achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”. In this regard, the document presents the UN’s objective to reinforce the centrality of the rule of law in all its activities and promote greater cohesion among its entities that provide rule of law support, including peacekeeping operations, special political missions and country teams. In 2012, the UN established a Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law—which is co-chaired by the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions of the Department of Peace Operations and the UN Development Programme—to promote coordination within the UN system in providing rule of law assistance at country and international levels.

Key Issues and Options

An overarching issue for members is the future of peace operations. The Pact of the Future calls for a review of peace operations. Members may wish to use the opportunity of this briefing by the heads of police components to explore the role of UN Police in the context of more nimble PKOs and SPMs

A continuing key issue for Council members is how to strengthen the role of UNPOL in UN peace operations. A related issue is supporting UNPOL in advancing the objectives in *A New Agenda for Peace* and *New Vision for the Rule of Law*. With a number of multidimensional peacekeeping operations undergoing transitions, the role of UNPOL in protecting civilians and building the policing capacity of host countries has become increasingly important. Members may wish to discuss the role of UNPOL in transitions of peacekeeping operations in the Working Group on Peacekeeping.

Council Dynamics

There is general agreement among Council members about the importance of UNPOL in helping to maintain public order, protect civilians, and assist host states in building their law enforcement capacities. Council members also recognise the critical role UNPOL plays in countries undergoing transition.

At the November 2023 briefing, some Council members highlighted UNPOL’s key role in peace operations in rebuilding trust and solidarity with communities, protecting civilians, strengthening the rule of law, combating arms proliferation, and promoting peacebuilding, among other things. Several members emphasised the role of women in policing and hailed the progress in implementing the Gender Parity strategy in UNPOL. This strategy was developed to create an enabling environment for the meaningful participation of uniformed women personnel in peace operations both at the headquarters and in the field.

Some members drew attention to the safety and security of police officers and the need to enhance strategic communication to combat mis- and disinformation. Other members stressed the need to improve UNPOL’s performance and build its capacity to adapt to the changing operating environment. This was the topic of discussion at a performance workshop held in early October 2024 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, with the participation of heads of police components.

While some members welcomed the closer integration of police into UN peacekeeping, others underscored the need for a clear delineation of the military and civilian components as their functions are quite different. In this context, the first joint heads of military and police components conference was held in Brussels on 8 October 2024 and focused on how to achieve greater integration and interoperability between the two components of UN peace operations.

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