

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

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

Denmark is expected to organise one signature event, an open debate on “[Ensuring adaptability in UN Peace Operations](#)” under the “Maintenance of international peace and security” agenda item. Denmark’s Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, is expected to chair the meeting. The briefers may include Secretary-General António Guterres and a civil society representative.

In March, the Security Council will hold its annual meeting on [strengthening cooperation between the UN and the European Union \(EU\)](#) under the agenda item “Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations in maintaining international peace and security”. EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas will brief.

African issues on the programme of work this month include:

- [Democratic Republic of the Congo \(DRC\)](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) with possible additional meetings depending on developments in eastern DRC; and
- [Sudan](#), briefing on the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee.

Several Middle Eastern issues will be discussed, including:

- [Syria](#), meetings on the political and humanitarian situations and on the chemical weapons track;
- [Yemen](#), monthly meeting on developments;
- “[The situation in the Middle East, including](#)

[the Palestinian question](#)”, monthly meeting on developments, briefing from Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator (SHRC) for Gaza Sigrid Kaag in line with resolution 2720 of 22 December 2023, and possible additional meetings depending on developments in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT);

- [Lebanon](#), consultations on the implementation of resolution 1701, which was adopted in 2006 and called for a cessation of hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel; and
- [Golan](#), consultations on the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF).

[Afghanistan](#) is the only Asian issue on the programme in March. The Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and hold its quarterly meeting on the situation in the country.

While [Haiti](#) was not on the programme at the time of writing, the Council is expected to consider the Secretary-General’s 24 February letter containing a comprehensive assessment of the situation in Haiti and his strategic recommendations on the full range of options for UN support for the country.

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

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

Meetings on other issues are possible, depending on developments.

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In Hindsight: The US Pivot on Ukraine and Shifting Security Council Dynamics

On 24 February, the Security Council adopted resolution 2774, a short US-authored text calling for a swift end to the Russia-Ukraine war and urging a lasting peace between the countries. Marking the third anniversary of Russia's invasion, it was the first substantive resolution on Ukraine passed by the Council since the war began in February 2022. The resolution underscored a major shift in the geopolitical landscape, highlighting Washington's evolving approach to the war and exposing fractures among the P3 (France, the UK, and the US). Earlier in the day, the General Assembly voted on competing resolutions—one authored by European Union (EU) member states and another by the US—after the US unexpectedly introduced its own text, omitting references to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, triggering a diplomatic standoff with Kyiv and its European allies. The divisions that emerged during the votes in both the Security Council and the General Assembly could signal a broader realignment in global diplomacy—one that could potentially reshape transatlantic relations, Council dynamics, and the future of international engagement on Ukraine.

Efforts at the UN on Ukraine

From the outset of the war, Ukraine's Western allies, led largely by the US, promoted a two-pronged strategy: providing hefty military and economic aid to Ukraine while seeking to isolate Russia diplomatically and through sanctions. At the General Assembly, they framed their support as a defence of the UN Charter's core principles, especially Article 2 (4), which states that members "shall refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state". Early General Assembly resolutions condemning Russia's aggression and its attempted annexation of occupied territories received overwhelming support. On 23 February 2023, Ukraine and its allies tabled a General Assembly resolution marking the first anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine that reaffirmed the need for a settlement based on the UN Charter's principles of sovereign equality and territorial integrity. It was adopted with 141 votes in favour.

However, even by the first anniversary, calls for a ceasefire were intensifying. A large number of countries (especially in the Global South) had begun to view the continuing war as a European security issue that had detrimental economic repercussions for them, particularly in the form of rising food prices. Some also expressed concern that the war in Ukraine was diverting global attention and humanitarian aid from other pressing crises, contributing to their decision to prioritise promoting an immediate cessation of hostilities.

As the war continued, Ukraine's partners continued to furnish generous military and financial support, while maintaining Russia's diplomatic isolation. They opposed calls for a ceasefire, arguing that it would freeze the front lines, leaving Russia in control of occupied Ukrainian territory. Instead, they insisted that the only "just" peace required Russia's full withdrawal from Ukraine's internationally recognised borders, pledging continued support to achieve that outcome.

US Strategic Recalibration

The inauguration of US President Donald Trump in January marked a sharp shift in Washington's Ukraine policy. On the campaign trail,

Trump had criticised US military aid and pledged to end the war within 24 hours. Once in office, he called for an immediate ceasefire, underscoring a decisive break from the stance of his predecessor, Joe Biden.

The Trump administration swiftly moved to shift responsibility for Ukraine's security onto Europe, downplaying the prospects of NATO membership for Kyiv and questioning the feasibility of restoring its pre-2014 borders—positions seen by many in Europe as major concessions to Moscow. The administration also echoed the Russian position at times, with Trump labelling Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy a dictator (although he later appeared to question this comment) and calling for elections in Ukraine. At the same time, he sought a natural resources agreement with Kyiv, which would involve rare earth minerals. During a 28 February visit to the White House—where the deal was expected to be signed—Zelenskyy and Trump clashed publicly during a press conference, and Zelenskyy left the White House without signing the deal.

Simultaneously, the US has pursued a rapprochement with Russia. On 18 February, a high-level US-Russia summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, signalled a broader reset in the relationship between the two countries. This raised concerns that Washington and Moscow might negotiate Ukraine's fate without Kyiv or its European allies. Analysts drew parallels to the Yalta Conference of 1945, where the Soviet Union, the UK, and the US divided postwar Europe into spheres of influence. The fear was that Ukraine could now be subject to a similar agreement, sidelining European security interests.

Adding to European unease, the Trump administration's position towards some traditional US allies also appears to be shifting. US officials have pressed Europe to take greater responsibility for Ukraine's security, while at the Munich Security Conference on 14 February, US Vice President JD Vance downplayed Russia and China as Europe's primary security threats. Instead, he framed the biggest challenge as Europe's own retreat from "some of its most fundamental values", including free speech and democracy, hinting at a potential shift in Washington's approach to its traditional transatlantic alliances.

Diplomatic Showdown at the UN

The shift in US policy culminated in a high-stakes confrontation at the UN on 24 February, the war's third anniversary. Kyiv and its European allies appear to have been caught off guard when Washington introduced its own draft resolution for consideration by both the General Assembly and the Security Council, despite ongoing negotiations on a Ukrainian- and European-led text to be tabled only in the General Assembly. The US proposal notably omitted references to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and avoided condemning Russia's invasion.

The move rattled European diplomats, particularly as Washington had been engaging in negotiations without expressing any obvious concerns with the Ukrainian-EU text. Breaking from transatlantic unity, the US pressed Ukraine to withdraw its draft resolution in favour of its own draft and urged member states to withhold support. It even threatened to vote against the Ukrainian-EU resolution. However, Ukraine and the EU members proceeded, setting the stage

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for a diplomatic showdown in the General Assembly framed as a contest between pragmatism and principle.

The US argued that achieving peace requires a forward-looking approach rather than assigning blame. France, speaking on behalf of EU member states, countered that any settlement must be rooted in international law to avoid legitimising aggression and paving the way for “the wars of tomorrow”. France further warned that failing to hold Russia accountable would enshrine “the primacy of force over law”, effectively endorsing the concept of spheres of influence and undermining sovereign equality.

The General Assembly vote revealed deep divisions among member states. The Ukrainian-EU resolution secured 93 votes in favour—48 fewer than a similar 2023 resolution—with notable shifts in African votes.¹ The US voted against it, together with Russia and 16 other countries, while 65 members abstained. Meanwhile, Russia proposed an amendment to the US resolution, adding language on the “root causes” of the conflict, while France, on behalf of EU member states, introduced three amendments that referenced Russia’s invasion, Ukraine’s sovereignty, and the need for a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace based on the UN Charter. Russia’s amendment failed due to insufficient support, whereas France’s amendments were adopted, leading the US to abstain on its own resolution. The US resolution was adopted with 93 votes in favour, eight against and 73 abstentions.

Fractures among the P3

Events in the Security Council that afternoon mirrored the tensions at the General Assembly. After the US announced on 21 February its intention to table a Security Council resolution nearly identical to its General Assembly text, discussions apparently took place among the P3, during which France and the UK proposed amendments to the US draft. While the US appears to have discussed proposals with Russia and Ukraine, it ultimately rejected European modifications and proceeded with its original draft.

It seems that, after proposing its General Assembly draft resolution, the US had also asked China, February’s Council President, to schedule the Security Council vote ahead of the General Assembly’s vote on the Ukrainian-EU resolution. There was some speculation that this could lead to a member invoking Article 12² of the UN Charter to try to stop the General Assembly vote. There were also concerns that holding the Security Council vote ahead of the General Assembly vote could undermine support for the Ukrainian-EU resolution. A Council vote on the US draft—which notably diverged from the Ukrainian-EU text by omitting references to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity—risked shaping perceptions ahead of the General Assembly vote. Some worried that this sequence could influence undecided member states, potentially leading to fewer votes in favour of the Ukrainian-EU resolution and more abstentions.

At the start of the Security Council meeting, France, on behalf

¹ 22 countries from the African Regional Group and 16 from the Asia-Pacific Regional Group that had previously voted in favour of the Ukrainian-EU text in 2023 either voted against, abstained, or did not participate in the vote this time.

² Article 12 stipulates that the General Assembly may not make recommendations on a dispute or situation in which the Security Council is actively exercising its functions under the Charter, unless the Council specifically requests it.

of Denmark, France, Greece, and the UK, proposed a motion to postpone the meeting. France argued that the US draft had been introduced “without real negotiations” and required further revisions. The US opposed the motion, which led to a procedural vote to adjourn the meeting until 3 pm the following day.³ The motion failed to pass, receiving six votes in favour (China, Denmark, France, Greece, Slovenia, and the UK), three against (Panama, Somalia, and the US), and six abstentions (Algeria, Guyana, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Russia, and Sierra Leone).

The Council then voted on five amendments—three from the five European Council members (E5) and two from Russia. The E5’s proposal to replace the “Russia-Ukraine conflict” with “the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation” failed to secure the required nine votes. Russia vetoed two other E5 amendments that sought to reaffirm Ukraine’s sovereignty and call for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace based on the principles of the UN Charter, including state sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia’s vetoes are expected to trigger a General Assembly meeting within ten days under the veto initiative.

Meanwhile, Russia’s amendments—one introducing language on the “root causes” of the conflict and another removing all references to Russia—also failed. The US abstained on all amendments, while China voted in favour of Russia’s proposal to address the “root causes” of the conflict and the E5 amendment calling for peace in line with the Charter. This reflects China’s view that the conflict’s origins are in part tied to broader issues, such as NATO expansion, as well as its firm commitment to the principle of state sovereignty.

SECURITY COUNCIL REPORT 24 February 2025 Vote on a US-proposed Resolution Urging a Lasting Peace between Russia and Ukraine, including Votes on the proposed Amendments			
Draft Resolution	Submitted by	Voting Results	Outcome
Resolution Urging a Lasting Peace between Russia and Ukraine	United States	10-0-5	Adopted
Draft Amendment(s)	Submitted by	Voting Results	Outcome
“full scale invasion” instead of “Russia-Ukraine conflict”	European Council Members	6-1-8	Failed (Insufficient Votes)
Reaffirming commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty	European Council Members	9-1-5	Failed (Russian Veto)
Insertion of Reference to the UN Charter	European Council Members	11-1-3	Failed (Russian Veto)
Insertion of Reference to Root causes	Russia	4-6-5	Failed (Insufficient Votes)
Deletion of References to Russian Federation	Russia	1-7-7	Failed (Insufficient Votes)

Voting Results indicate the number of votes in favour, against, and abstentions

With no amendments adopted, the Council proceeded to vote on the US text in its original form. The E5 abstained, while all other members voted in favour. There appears to have been speculation around whether France and the UK were considering voting against the resolution, which may have encouraged others not to support it. In such a scenario, if the draft had failed to garner the requisite nine or more votes for adoption, negative votes from France and the UK would not have constituted vetoes, which neither country has used since 1989, when these members, together with the US, blocked a draft resolution condemning the US intervention in Panama.

Ultimately, France and the UK abstained, apparently viewing the resolution as acceptable but flawed. While both voted against the

³ This was in line with rule 33 (3) of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure, which allows the Council to suspend a meeting to a certain day or hour.

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Russian amendments, their negative votes did not constitute a veto, as the amendments failed to gain the necessary support for adoption. However, had Russia's amendments secured enough votes for adoption, it seems that France and the UK may have considered using their veto.

The timing of the vote was also significant. It coincided with the visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to Washington for discussions on security guarantees for Ukraine and took place only days before UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer's trip to Washington on 27 February—both reflecting broader strategic calculations in Paris' and London's approach at the Security Council.

Implications on Security Council Dynamics

The proceedings marked a major shift in Ukraine-related diplomacy, exposing a deepening fracture among the P3. While the full repercussions remain to be seen, the effects are likely to extend well beyond the Ukraine dossier.

Relations among the P3 may deteriorate further as US-Russia talks progress. Should Washington and Moscow reach a bilateral deal on Ukraine, the implications for European security could be profound. A settlement that redraws borders or weakens NATO's commitments to Eastern Europe, for example, could validate long-standing fears of a "new Yalta". Consequently, France and the UK may find themselves aligning with China, which has consistently emphasised that any settlement should be consistent with the UN Charter. In its 24 February explanation of vote, China stressed that "Europe ought to play its part for peace", signalling that it sees European involvement as essential in any future negotiations.

For now, P3 divisions are likely to continue shaping the Council's engagement on Ukraine. France, as a penholder on humanitarian issues in Ukraine, is expected to push for regular Council discussions on humanitarian developments, as has been the practice for the last three years, while the US may prefer to avoid contentious meetings that risk derailing diplomatic efforts.

These divergences could be more visible if new Security Council resolutions on Ukraine are tabled. The long-standing reluctance to propose products on this issue—because of Western Council members' insistence on using condemnatory language against Russia and the near certainty of a Russian veto—has now been broken, and the precedent set by the recent vote could invite further minimalistic drafts aimed at securing the consent of all permanent members. Whether such texts succeed in forging genuine consensus or merely exacerbate existing tensions remains to be seen, but they underscore the shifting dynamics at play in the Council's evolving approach to the Ukrainian conflict.

Beyond Ukraine, US-Russia coordination could reshape European security debates at the UN, particularly on long-standing disputes in the Balkans, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. In this respect, attention is turning to Trump's trio for the Balkans—Richard Grenell, now Special Presidential Envoy for Special Missions, who previously brokered economic agreements between Belgrade and

Pristina; Rod Blagojevich, who has ties to the Serbian-American community and is rumoured as a possible candidate for US ambassador to Serbia; and Jared Kushner, who has business ventures in the region. Regional observers are closely monitoring the actions of this trio to assess potential shifts towards a more adaptable US policy in the Balkans. This could significantly weaken Europe's position and reshape the Council's approach to these long-standing disputes.

Yet a US-Russia rapprochement could also create opportunities for cooperation on other conflicts. Russia has historically used the Security Council to challenge the US on Middle East issues like Gaza. However, at a 25 February Security Council briefing on the file, Russia—departing from its usual rhetoric—said in reference to the role played by the new US administration in securing the recent ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas that its "intervention at the final stage made it possible to achieve tangible results".

This suggests that a pragmatic thaw between Washington and Moscow could soften their respective stances in some diplomatic arenas. Whether this translates into substantive cooperation remains to be seen, but it could recalibrate multilateral diplomacy on key global crises where both powers hold influence. Agreement between the US and Russia in the past has helped achieve substantial progress on some files. For instance, in December 2015, after many months of deadlock over the Syria file, high-level US-Russia engagement secured the adoption of resolution 2254, that focused on a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

Despite these shifts, significant limits to a US-Russia partnership remain. One major flashpoint is Iran. Western countries continue to express deep concerns over Iran's violations of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), its lack of cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and its military support for both Middle Eastern proxies and Russia in Ukraine. By contrast, China and Russia remain strong backers of Tehran. This divide could resurface as the JCPOA's sunset provisions approach their expiration in October 2025, with Council members weighing whether to trigger the snapback mechanism to restore UN sanctions.

Moreover, while Trump's first presidency featured friendly rhetoric towards Russia, his administration's actions often contradicted this tone. In 2018, for example, although he invited Russia to rejoin the G7 and engaged in Syria deconfliction talks, he also expanded the European Deterrence Initiative by 41 percent and imposed sanctions on Russian oligarchs and officials. It remains possible that his second term will follow a similar pattern. While Trump's rhetoric on Ukraine has been favourable to Russia, key officials—including Vice President JD Vance—have suggested that military and economic tools remain on the table should Moscow not negotiate in good faith.

At the same time, the US decision to table a resolution competing with Ukraine and EU members at the General Assembly, and its unwillingness to negotiate the draft it brought to the Security Council, signals a shift from rhetoric to a more assertive—and potentially disruptive—diplomatic style, one that is likely to have significant repercussions for the Security Council's work.

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The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

On 25 February, the Security Council held its regular monthly briefing and closed consultations on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” (MEPQ) (S/PV.9868). Sigrid Kaag briefed in her capacity as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process ad interim. Two civil society representatives also briefed: Daniel Levy, President of the US/Middle East Project—a non-profit policy institute focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—and Noa Argamani, a former Israeli hostage who had been held in Gaza.

South Sudan

On 5 February, the Security Council held a briefing, followed by consultations, to discuss the situation in South Sudan (S/PV.9855) based on the Secretary-General’s latest report (S/2025/54) published on 24 January. Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan and Head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), Nicholas Haysom; Major General Charles Tai Gituai, Interim Chairperson of the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission; and Mr. Edmund Yakani, Executive Director, Community Empowerment for Progress Organization briefed.

UNRCCA (Central Asia)

On 6 February, Council members received a briefing in consultations on the work of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) from Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNRCCA Kaha Imnadze.

Counter-Terrorism

On 10 February, the Security Council held a briefing on the Secretary-General’s 20th biannual strategic-level report (S/2025/72) on the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) (S/PV.9856). Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism and Head of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) Vladimir Voronkov and Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) Natalia Gherman briefed.

Ukraine

On 17 February, the Security Council convened for a briefing on Ukraine under the “Threats to international peace and security” agenda item (S/PV.9859). Russia requested the meeting to mark the tenth anniversary of the Security Council’s adoption of resolution 2202 of 17 February 2015, which endorsed the “Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements”, also known as the Minsk II agreement, signed on 12 February 2015. The briefers were Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas Miroslav Jenča and musician and Pink Floyd co-founder Roger Waters. Germany and Ukraine participated under rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure.

On 24 February, the Council voted on a draft resolution on Ukraine authored by the US (S/PV.9866). Prior to the vote, Council members Denmark, France, Greece, and the UK requested closed consultations to discuss the text. Following the consultations, France, on behalf of these three other members, then proposed a procedural vote to postpone the session until the following afternoon (25

February), citing rule 33 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure. The motion was not adopted because it did not garner the requisite votes—receiving six votes in favour (China, Denmark, France, Greece, Slovenia, and the UK), three against (Panama, Somalia, and the US), and six abstentions (Algeria, Guyana, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Russia, and Sierra Leone).

The US-authored draft text, which was adopted as resolution 2774, urges a lasting peace between Russia and Ukraine and implores a swift end to the conflict between the two countries. The resolution received ten votes in favour and five abstentions (Denmark, France, Greece, Slovenia, and the UK). Prior to this vote, the Council considered five draft amendments to the text: three proposed by the European Council members (E5)—Denmark, France, Greece, Slovenia, and the UK—and two proposed by Russia. None of these were adopted.

On 24 February, the Council also convened for a high-level briefing on Ukraine (S/PV.9867). The meeting was requested by Ukraine—supported by Denmark, France, Greece, Panama, the Republic of Korea, Slovenia, the UK, and the US—to mark the third anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed the Council. Ukraine and several regional countries (Czechia, Finland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, and Spain) participated under rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure.

“Practicing Multilateralism, Reforming and Improving Global Governance”

On 18 and 20 February, the Security Council held a ministerial-level open debate on “Practicing Multilateralism, Reforming and Improving Global Governance” under the “Maintenance of international peace and security” agenda item (S/PV.9861 and Resumption I and II). Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi chaired the meeting, which was the signature event of China’s Council presidency. UN Secretary-General António Guterres briefed.

Libya

On 19 February, the Security Council held an open briefing on Libya (S/PV.9862). Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed on the latest political, security, and humanitarian developments in the country. Pending the finalisation of the discussion on the allocation of chairs of subsidiary bodies, China, in its capacity as Security Council president in February and in line with the understanding reached among Council members, briefed on the work of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee. Libya participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure.

Central African Republic

On 20 February, the Security Council held a briefing on the situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) (S/PV.9864). Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the CAR and Head of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) Valentine Rugwabiza briefed on the Secretary-General’s report on MINUSCA, which was published on 14 February (S/2025/97).

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DPRK (North Korea)

On 26 February, Council members met in closed consultations to discuss the 90-day report on the work of the 1718 Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Sanctions Committee. Ordinarily, the Chair of the Committee briefs Council members on the report. However, since the Chair had not yet been appointed, China delivered the report as the president of the Security Council in February.

Peace Operations

On 27 February, the Security Council received its annual briefing from the heads of police components of UN peace operations (S/PV.9870). Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix; UN Police Adviser Commissioner Faisal Shahkar; General Christophe Kabangu Bizimungu, the Police Commissioner

for the UN Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA); and Chief Superintendent Mingzhu Xu, Senior Police Advisor for the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), briefed.

Somalia

On 28 February, the Council adopted resolution 2775, constituting a technical rollover until 3 March of the sanctions measures and other relevant provisions under the 2713 Al-Shabaab sanctions regime before their expiration on that date. This rollover was agreed upon pending the finalisation of Council negotiations on the extension of the sanctions regime and the mandate renewal of the Panel of Experts assisting the 2713 Al-Shabaab Sanctions Committee.

Syria

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

Since the December 2024 ouster of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, led by the Security Council-listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), Syria's caretaker authorities have been focused on unifying Syria, building state structures, and reviving the country's struggling economy. While trying to deal with a multitude of challenges due to years of conflict, including on the security and humanitarian fronts, the caretaker authorities have announced steps toward a transitional process that will lead to elections in four to five years.

Following the 29 January declaration in which HTS leader Ahmed al-Sharaa was named Syria's interim president, the caretaker leadership pledged to create an inclusive transitional government representing Syria's diversity. On 12 February, Sharaa announced the establishment of the Preparatory Committee for the National Dialogue Conference. The committee, which is made up of five men and two women from diverse backgrounds (including law, governance, civil society, and political science), reportedly conducted consultations across various Syrian provinces leading up to the 25 February National Dialogue Conference, which concluded with a final statement laying the groundwork for a new constitution. Reportedly, the statement *inter alia* called for a "temporary constitutional declaration", the preservation of Syrian unity and sovereignty, respect for human rights, including support for the role of women in all fields, advancing transitional justice and accountability, and economic development policies. During the conference, Sharaa also announced the formation of a transitional justice body. The conference, however, was met with some criticism for being hastily organised and underrepresented, raising questions about how comprehensive it was.

On 14 February, at a conference on Syria in Paris, caretaker

foreign minister Assad al-Shaibani reiterated the pledge that the new Syrian government, scheduled to take office on 1 March, would reflect the diversity of the country. During the conference, multiple countries pledged to help rebuild Syria and signed a declaration stating their intent to work together to ensure "the success of the post-Assad transition in the framework of a process that must be Syrian-led". Syria, Lebanon, Türkiye, multiple European nations (including France, Germany, Greece, and Italy), and G7 members Canada, Japan, and the UK signed the declaration. The US did not sign it, reportedly because Washington has yet to form its policy regarding the new Syrian authorities and may have reservations about Sharaa and HTS, both under US sanctions.

Briefing the Council on 12 February, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen noted that the roadmap being laid out by the caretaker leadership "shows considerable overlap with the key principles of resolution 2254". (Adopted on 18 December 2015, resolution 2254 focused on a political solution to the Syria crisis.) Pedersen informed the Council that the caretaker authorities have committed to consulting with the UN on all steps of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned transition and expressed the hope that this commitment would translate into follow-up action. (For more information, see our 11 February *What's in Blue* story.)

The security landscape in Syria remains fragmented, with many armed groups still maintaining various levels of autonomy. In his 12 February briefing, Pedersen warned that the situation in northeastern Syria is "extremely concerning" with "daily front-line hostilities impacting civilians". Clashes between the Turkish forces and the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) forces on the one hand and the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on the other continue. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, more than 627 people have been killed in Syria, including 56 civilians, since 12 December 2024.

In an apparent breakthrough in negotiations between Syria's caretaker authorities and the SDF, the commander of the SDF's Northern Brigade announced on 18 February that an agreement had been

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA Security Council Resolution S/RES/2254 (18 December 2015) focused exclusively on a political solution to the Syrian crisis and 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.

Syria

reached to integrate their forces into the Syrian government's army. One of the key elements of the agreement reportedly includes the departure of foreign fighters linked with the Kurdistan Workers Party, which Türkiye considers a terrorist organisation. Subsequent statements from the SDF, however, did not corroborate the announcement, as negotiations are reportedly still facing disagreements on how the SDF's forces would be integrated into the national army.

Following Assad's ouster, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) positioned forces within the demilitarised buffer zone in the Golan, citing security risks. According to media reports, Israel has built at least seven new military outposts in the demilitarised buffer zone—which was established by the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement between Israel and Syria—since December 2024, including in Syrian Mount Hermon. Although Israel had initially indicated that its incursions into the area would be temporary, Defence Minister Israel Katz said on 28 January that the IDF would remain in the buffer zone “indefinitely”. The IDF's presence violates the 1974 Agreement, and Special Envoy Pedersen has called on Israel to withdraw. Commenting on Israel's presence in the buffer zone, Sharaa has emphasised that Syria remains committed to the 1974 Agreement and is ready to welcome UN forces to “restore conditions to their prior state”. (For more information, see the brief on the UN Disengagement Observer Force [UNDOF] in our March 2025 *Monthly Forecast*.)

On 24 February, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu further demanded the complete demilitarisation of southern Syria and affirmed that Israel would not allow any HTS or Syrian forces to enter the area south of Damascus. Following reported Israeli airstrikes in southern Syria on 25 February, Katz stressed that “any attempt by the Syrian regime forces and the country's terrorist organizations to establish themselves in the security zone in southern Syria - will be met with fire.” That same day, the statement adopted at the Syrian National Dialogue Conference condemned Israel's infiltration into Syrian territory as a blatant violation of Syria's sovereignty, demanded a complete withdrawal, and rejected Netanyahu's statements referring to them as “provocative”.

On 8 February, Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fernando Arias visited Syria and met with Syrian caretaker authorities to discuss the next steps towards the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons. The OPCW described the meetings as “long, productive and very open, with an in-depth exchange of information, which will serve as a basis to reach tangible results and break the stalemate that has lasted for over eleven years”. The Director-General presented the caretaker authorities with a 9-point Action Plan for Syria. On 24 February, the OPCW published its monthly report on the implementation of resolution 2118 of 27 September 2013, which required the verification and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 27 January, the UN Human Rights Council-mandated Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Syria published a comprehensive report that uncovered the depth of the Assad regime's use of arbitrary detention to suppress public dissent during the first decade of the Syrian war. Drawing on extensive investigations since the conflict's start, *Web of Agony: Arbitrary Detention, Torture, and Ill-Treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic* based its findings on more than 2,000 witness testimonies, including over 550 interviews with

survivors of torture. This is the Commission's most extensive analysis to date of detention-related violations by the former regime.

Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Chair of the Commission, expressed hope that such findings would help end impunity following patterns of abuse—underscoring that “they stand at a critical juncture wherein the caretaker government and future Syrian authorities can now ensure these crimes are never repeated”. The report furthermore stressed the urgent need for decisive action to safeguard evidence and crime sites, including mass graves, until they can be examined by experts.

Women, Peace and Security

In an update on the situation of women in Syria, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security highlighted that, despite the ouster of Assad in December 2024, significant challenges remain in achieving peace, stability, and respect for human rights in the country. Spotlighting the humanitarian crisis in Syria, the update noted that although women-led and women's rights organisations have been instrumental to the humanitarian response, they continue to face “chronic underfunding and operating restrictions”. Among other recommendations, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security urged the Security Council to prioritise the “full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of diverse women in a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political transition, and demand respect by all parties for the human rights of diverse women and girls”. It also urged the Council to call on UN member states to fund the humanitarian response in Syria and provide direct, flexible and consistent funding to local women-led organisations.

Key Issues and Options

The most pressing issue before the Council remains 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, support the formation of credible state institutions, and establish a non-sectarian and representative governance structure.

In the event of the formation of a credible Syrian caretaker government in March, the Council could consider issuing a presidential statement welcoming the step and expressing support for a Syrian-led inclusive, transparent and credible political transition, in the spirit of the key principles of resolution 2254. The statement could also reaffirm the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and reinforce the Council's backing for the UN to have a role in the transitional process.

In light of recent reports about concerns that extrajudicial and revenge killings are increasing, the Council could also consider including elements in the statement that call on the Syrian caretaker authorities to prioritise transitional justice, encourage cooperation with independent investigative mechanisms, and urge international support for the caretaker authorities in preventing the resurgence of terrorism in Syria.

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 and internally displaced persons. During her Council briefing on 12 February, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya outlined the country's immense humanitarian crisis and called for “generous funding pledges” in the face of shortfalls impacting life-saving aid and access to essential services. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi has similarly appealed to the international community to help support hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees to return to their homes, rebuild their lives, and reduce poverty.

Syria

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.

The Council could request the UN Refugees Agency (UNHCR) to brief on the humanitarian challenges of repatriating Syrian refugees. Council members could also encourage UN member states to support the OCHA's humanitarian response plan for Syria in the Council's monthly meetings on the file.

Council and Wider Dynamics

While there is acknowledgement of the positive messaging from the authorities in Damascus on a range of issues, including governance, many countries are likely to evaluate their stance and support based on the authorities' concrete actions and implementation of commitments in the months ahead.

Key regional and international stakeholders, including several Council members, have held high-level meetings with the caretaker leadership. French President Emmanuel Macron has reportedly invited Sharaa to visit Paris, and Shaibani similarly received an invitation to Brussels from the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President Kaja Kallas. This shows a clear willingness to constructively engage with the interim leadership on the part of key European powers, which may sense an opportunity to enhance their relationship with Syria in the wake of significantly reduced Iranian and Russian influence.

Russia, which had maintained a significant military presence in the country over the years and was a staunch ally of the Assad government, has recently also bolstered its efforts to engage with the new caretaker authorities, including through a reported phone call between Sharaa and Russian President Vladimir Putin on 12 February. Moscow may be seeking to retain its air base in Hmeimim and naval base in Tartous, which afford it strategic access to the Mediterranean. Furthermore, according to media reports, Syria's central bank received a

consignment of Syrian currency from Russia on 14 February.

Meanwhile Washington, under the new Trump administration, has yet to clarify its policy or approach to Syria's caretaker authorities. In early February, Sharaa said he had not had any contact with the Trump administration. A recent media report has indicated that Washington has expressed interest in pulling US troops out of north-east Syria. In a 14 February statement, Secretary of State Marco Rubio vaguely referred to the need to pursue an opportunity to create stability in Syria, and during the 12 February Council meeting on Syria, the US Ambassador said that Rubio has underscored the need to prevent Syria from becoming a safe haven for terrorism.

Council members seem to be in agreement with regard to a credible, transparent and inclusive transitional process, but there may be divergences related to the question of sanctions. The European Union (EU) lifted sanctions on 24 February impacting Syria's oil, gas, electricity and transport sectors as part of its effort to support Syria's transition, economic recovery and reconstruction. According to the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs Kaja Kallas, the sanctions relief will be contingent on a political transition that is inclusive and considers all of Syria's different groups. At the beginning of January the US, under the Biden administration, had eased some restrictions on humanitarian aid but did not lift sanctions. There may also be differences over Israel's presence in the Golan Heights and its military activities in Syrian territory.

Council members have also 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.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council will hold its monthly briefing and consultations on Yemen. UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg (via videoconference), a representative of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and a civil society representative are expected to brief.

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

Key Recent Developments

Yemen continues to face immense challenges on the political, security, and humanitarian fronts. The reaction of the Yemeni Houthi rebel group to Israel's military campaign in Gaza—which involved attacks on commercial and military vessels in the Red Sea and on Israeli

territory—has stalled the intra-Yemeni political process, degraded the country's security and humanitarian environment, and raised doubts about the overall prospects for peace.

Following the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas that went into effect on 19 January, the Houthis ceased their attacks on vessels in the Red Sea and on targets in Israel. This pause in hostilities and the release on 22 January of the MV *Galaxy Leader* crew—whom the Houthis had detained in November 2023—were welcomed as de-escalatory steps by Council members during their most recent meeting on Yemen on 13 February. The fragility of the Gaza ceasefire, however, coupled with a lack of predictability as to how the Houthis may react to regional developments, continue to contribute to a general sense of insecurity, particularly on the question of maritime security in the Red Sea.

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Furthermore, the Houthis' arbitrary detention of the UN, non-governmental organisations (NGO), civil society, and diplomatic mission personnel has undermined trust and efforts to advance the Yemeni peace process while also impacting the country's humanitarian situation. Since May 2024, the Houthis have detained over 50 such personnel. In late January, the group detained eight additional UN personnel, one of whom—a World Food Programme (WFP) staff member—died in detention on 10 February. That same day, the UN decided to temporarily pause all operations and programmes in the Sa'ada governate—where six of the recently detained personnel had been working—citing the erosion of the “necessary security conditions and guarantees” for the UN to operate in the area. On 11 February, the Secretary-General issued a statement that strongly condemned the death of the WFP staff member and called for an “immediate, transparent and thorough” investigation into the circumstances leading to it.

In a 13 February press statement, Security Council members also condemned the death of the WFP staff member and the ongoing detentions by the Houthis, demanding the immediate and unconditional release of all those detained. The statement further expressed Council members' grave concern about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Yemen and the risk to the delivery of essential humanitarian assistance, demanding that the Houthis ensure safe, rapid, and unimpeded humanitarian access. Council members also emphasised that the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate in the absence of a political solution to the Yemeni conflict and expressed their support for Grundberg's mediation efforts in this regard.

With the political process deadlocked, the security situation in Yemen remains a concern. In his 13 February Council briefing, Grundberg warned of rising tensions in Yemen and referred to the reported deployment of military reinforcements to the frontlines. He called on the parties to refrain from “military posturing and retaliatory measures that could lead to further tension and risk plunging Yemen back into conflict” and cautioned that those who seek the “resumption of full-scale military operations” would contribute to instability in Yemen and the wider region.

On 22 January, US President Donald Trump designated the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO), citing the need to prevent attacks on US personnel and civilians, US partners, and maritime shipping in the Red Sea. In January 2021, during his last presidency, Trump had designated the Houthis as an FTO, a decision that was reversed by Biden as soon as he took office. Under US law, an FTO designation authorises sanctions on entities that provide the designated group with “material support”, and the executive order designating the Houthis referred to the support allegedly provided to the group by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force.

In his 13 February briefing to the Council, Tom Fletcher, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, urged Council members not to make political or security decisions that hinder civilian access to essential services and commodities. Stressing that Yemenis are on the “precipice of disaster”, Fletcher highlighted the severe challenges that OCHA described in its 2025 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) for the country. Among other issues, Fletcher emphasised

the risks faced by children who are suffering high mortality rates, malnourishment, and lack of access to vaccinations and education. He also urged the Council to guarantee protection for humanitarian workers and to scale up funding for humanitarian efforts. The HNRP calls for \$2.47 billion to provide assistance and protection services to the most vulnerable populations.

Key Issues and Options

De-escalating tensions in Yemen and the Red Sea and relaunching the stalled intra-Yemeni political process remain overarching priorities for the Security Council. If the Gaza ceasefire continues to hold and progresses to the next phase, Council members may seek to take advantage of the Houthis' concurrent pause in Red Sea hostilities and their attacks on Israel to encourage further de-escalation and a resumption of dialogue between the Houthis and the Yemeni government towards a nationwide ceasefire and a political settlement. One option for the Council in this regard would be to issue a presidential statement or press statement encouraging the Houthis to avoid escalations and Yemeni parties to preserve the progress made in 2022 and 2023—during which they signed and largely sustained a truce—and resume concrete discussions on establishing a roadmap under UN auspices for inclusive peace in the country.

A related issue is the impact the continued threat of possible attacks by the Houthis in the Red Sea has had on the freedom of navigation, global supply chains, and the provision of humanitarian aid in Yemen. An option would be to hold an informal interactive dialogue with regional countries to discuss the importance of maritime security, freedom of navigation, stability of supply chains, and safety of seafarers.

Council members may also seek to address the country's deepening humanitarian crisis by encouraging the parties to remove obstacles impeding the delivery of humanitarian aid and by urging member states to mobilise funding to meet the requirements of the HNRP, 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 further attacks in the Red Sea. Many members have expressed hope that the ceasefire in Gaza can provide the momentum, conditions, and space to relaunch dialogue and resume the peace process under UN auspices. Advancing mediation efforts towards the establishment of a roadmap to this end remains a mutual priority. In light of increasing reports of escalatory rhetoric and military posturing, some Council members raised concerns during the 13 February Council meeting about the potential for further instability.

Nevertheless, Council members have divergent views on what is fuelling the political stalemate and insecurity in Yemen. In Council meetings, Algeria, China, Pakistan, and Russia have stressed that the situation in Yemen and the Red Sea cannot be discussed in isolation from the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, and some have directly blamed Israel for instability in the region. Russia has also accused the UK and the US of undermining security in Yemen through their retaliatory strikes on the Houthis. On the other hand,

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the P3 members (France, the UK, and the US) have been critical of Iran's role in supporting the Houthis, including militarily.

The US' designation of the Houthis as an FTO appears to signal a shift in how the US will approach the situation in Yemen, adopting a more forceful position that is likely to have repercussions on Yemen's political, security and humanitarian fronts. The Houthis have reportedly mobilised forces towards Marib—a province controlled by the Yemeni government that holds oil and gas resources that could gain importance in the event of any shortages caused by the sanctions.

During the 13 February Council meeting, the US stressed that the FTO designation was an important step to respond to the Houthis' threat to civilians and regional stability and criticised Iran for enabling the attacks. Yemen welcomed the listing and expressed hope that it would promote efforts to achieve peace. On the other hand, Russia criticised the decision for potentially having a negative

impact on mediation efforts to relaunch the political process. Additionally, the FTO designation may impact humanitarian operations in Yemen and the country's already vulnerable civilian population. Aid organisations have criticised the move, saying that it would exacerbate Yemen's humanitarian crisis and strain the country's economy, given its heavy reliance on imports for food, fuel, and medicine, a concern which was also raised by some Council members during their last meeting on Yemen.

Furthermore, Council members may have increasing concerns regarding a lack of funding addressing the dire humanitarian crisis in Yemen, which may have grown in light of the recent US Agency for International Development (USAID) suspensions. In 2024, USAID disbursed approximately \$620 million to Yemen, \$580 million of which was for humanitarian assistance.

The UK is the penholder on Yemen.

Afghanistan

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). UNAMA's current mandate expires on 17 March.

The Council is also scheduled to convene for its quarterly open briefing on Afghanistan. Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNAMA, Roza Otunbayeva, and a representative of civil society are expected to brief. Closed consultations are scheduled to follow the briefing.

Key Recent Developments

Afghanistan continues to grapple with one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world. According to the 2025 Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (2025 HNRP), 22.9 million Afghans will require humanitarian assistance this year, including 21 million lacking adequate water and sanitation, 14.8 million facing acute food insecurity, 14.3 million experiencing limited access to healthcare, and 7.8 million women and children requiring nutrition assistance. The HNRP also notes that stagnation in Afghanistan's economy, which has contracted by approximately one-third since the Taliban seized power in August 2021, has contributed to widespread unemployment, underemployment, household debt, and poverty that affects around 48 percent of the population and severely restricts their ability to afford goods and services.

Despite the scale of this crisis, the humanitarian response in Afghanistan has struggled to attract funding. OCHA's 2024 Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, which called for \$3.06 billion, was only 51.8 percent funded by the end of last year. In January, the World Food Programme (WFP) reported that it had been unable to provide rations to roughly half of the Afghans in acute need of food during winter because of funding cuts.

Efforts to respond to the humanitarian crisis have also been affected by the policies and practices of the Taliban. The 2025 HNRP notes that the "Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the

Prevention of Vice", which was promulgated by the Taliban in late August 2024, is likely to continue impacting humanitarian operations and indicates that "restrictive policies, bureaucratic and administrative impediments related to project registration and efforts to influence project design and implementation" have complicated the operational environment for humanitarian actors.

The human rights situation in Afghanistan remains dire, particularly for women and girls. According to UNAMA's latest report on this issue, Taliban officials have continued to implement the "Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice" in ways which discriminate against women and girls and impact their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including by imposing additional restrictions that are not outlined in the decree. The report also highlights other human rights violations, such as the use of corporal punishment, restrictions on freedom of expression, and gender-based violence.

In late December 2024, the Taliban's Ministry of Economy announced that any non-governmental organisations which fail to comply with a December 2022 decree prohibiting them from employing Afghan women will have their licences revoked. (For more information on the December 2022 decree, see our 12 January 2023 *What's in Blue* story.) In a 31 December 2024 statement, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk expressed alarm regarding the announcement and reiterated his call for the Taliban to reverse the decree.

On 27 December 2024, Council members issued a press statement on Afghanistan. Among other matters, the press statement expressed deep concern regarding the negative impact of the Taliban's policies that restrict the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls and urged the Taliban to reverse these practices, including the "Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice" and the December 2024 directive preventing women and girls from attending classes at medical institutions. It further underscored the importance of dialogue, consultation, and engagement among all Afghan stakeholders, including through the

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Doha process convened by the UN, and emphasised the importance of developing a political roadmap.

Signs of disunity among the Taliban's leadership have also emerged in recent weeks. In mid-January, Taliban Deputy Foreign Minister Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai publicly criticised the ban on girls' education, reportedly saying that it does not align with Islamic law and calling for a change in policy.

Terrorism continues to pose a serious threat in Afghanistan. On 11 February, dozens of people were killed and injured by a suicide bombing near a bank in Kunduz. The attack, which was claimed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K)—ISIL's Afghan affiliate—was condemned by Council members in a 12 February press statement. China authored the press statement.

The 6 February report of the Monitoring Team assisting the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL/Da'esh Sanctions Committee says that ISIL-K has been assessed as posing the “greatest extraregional terrorist threat” and notes that the group has conducted attacks in Europe and is actively seeking to recruit members from Central Asian states. The report also indicates that there are more than two dozen terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan that pose “a serious challenge to the stability of the country, as well as to the security of Central Asian and other neighbouring states”.

Against this backdrop, the Taliban has continued to seek closer ties with member states. On 8 January, Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in Dubai. Following the meeting, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs issued a statement noting that the discussions covered humanitarian assistance programmes, Afghanistan's developmental needs, and the use of Chabahar port for trade and commercial activities, among other matters. On 26 January, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi met with Taliban officials, including Muttaqi, in Kabul. The discussions reportedly focused on tensions on the border between Afghanistan and Iran, Afghan refugees in Iran, and water rights. On 22 December 2024, Saudi Arabia announced that it would reopen its embassy in Kabul for the first time since August 2021.

Tensions between Pakistan and the Taliban have risen significantly in recent months. In a 26 December 2024 post on X, UNAMA said that it had “received credible reports that dozens of civilians, including women and children, were killed in airstrikes by Pakistan's military forces” in Paktika province on 24 December 2024 and called for an investigation into the incident. Several media outlets have reported that the strikes targeted Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), citing Pakistani security officials. On 28 December 2024, the Taliban announced that it had attacked several targets inside Pakistan in retaliation for the airstrikes.

In early February, Pakistani authorities threatened to deport Afghan refugees awaiting relocation if their cases are not processed quickly by potential host states and ordered those living in Islamabad and surrounding areas to move elsewhere within Pakistan by 31 March.

On 31 January, the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction issued a report on the frozen assets belonging to Afghanistan's central bank. The report argued that the Taliban has no legal right to the assets and indicated that the Trump administration may want to examine returning nearly \$4 billion earmarked for Afghanistan to the “custody and control” of the US government.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 23 January, International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor Karim Asad Ahmad Khan announced that his office had filed applications for arrest warrants for Taliban Supreme Leader Haibatullah Akhundzada and Taliban Chief Justice Abdul Hakim Haqqani, saying that there are reasonable grounds to believe that both men “bear criminal responsibility for the crime against humanity of persecution on gender grounds”. On 24 January, a group of independent human rights experts appointed by the Human Rights Council issued a statement welcoming the request.

Women, Peace and Security

On 23 January, the Informal Experts Group (IEG) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) met on the situation in Afghanistan. Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (Political) for Afghanistan Georgette Gagnon briefed. According to the summary of the meeting (S/2025/119), circulated on 13 February by Denmark and Sierra Leone as the IEG co-chairs, together with the UK, the penholder on WPS, the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan has continued to deteriorate. Among other issues, Gagnon and Council members discussed restrictions and violations of the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, engagement with the de facto authorities by UNAMA and Afghan women, as well as sexual and gender-based violence. IEG members inquired about decrees, edicts, and laws restricting women's rights; the challenges faced by UNAMA in implementing its mandate with regard to the rights of women and girls; as well as women's participation and the inclusion of women's rights in the Doha process.

UN Women, as the IEG Secretariat, recommended that, in its consideration of UNAMA's mandate, the Security Council retain all existing gender-related language from resolution 2626, which renewed UNAMA's mandate in March 2022 and called for its full implementation. UN Women also recommended that the Council demand women's meaningful participation in all diplomatic efforts regarding Afghanistan, condemn the new restrictions imposed on women and girls by the de facto authorities, and demand that humanitarian service providers are able to conduct their work safely and without discrimination on the basis of gender. UN Women further recommended that Council members request detailed information from international partners on women's participation in relevant diplomatic engagements on Afghanistan and on the inclusion of women's rights in the agendas of such events. It also recommended committing a minimum of 30 percent of all funding for Afghanistan to initiatives focused on gender equality and women's rights, including long-term, flexible funding to women-led organisations.

Key Issues and Options

The renewal of UNAMA's mandate is a key priority for the Security Council in March. The Council will need to decide whether to extend the mission's mandate for another year without making any changes to its priorities and tasks or if there is a need to adjust the mandate. It seems that Council members generally consider the mission's mandate to be sufficiently robust, although there may be differences over whether to include preambular language on certain issues, such as human rights.

The Taliban's continuing refusal to adhere to many of Afghanistan's international obligations, especially those relating to women and girls, is a major issue for the Council and directly contradicts the recommendations outlined in the report of the independent assessment on Afghanistan requested by resolution 2679 of 16 March 2023 and the related Doha process. (For more information on the independent assessment, see our 27 November 2023, 8 December 2023, and 28 December 2023 *What's in Blue* stories.) Council members could ask for an informal meeting with representatives of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and UNAMA to discuss how to proceed in light of the Taliban's actions. Members could use this meeting to ask questions about particular

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aspects of the independent assessment recommendations, including the roadmap for political engagement. They could also ask for an update on the next steps in relation to the Doha process and the activities of the working groups on counter-narcotics and the private sector that participants in the third Doha meeting agreed to establish in mid-2024. The working groups held virtual meetings on 12 and 13 February, respectively.

The terrorist threat in Afghanistan is also a major concern for the Council. Members could request a meeting with a counter-terrorism expert to discuss possible options for responding to this threat. Members may also wish to consider whether any of the terrorist groups currently operating in Afghanistan that are not included on the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL/Da'esh Sanctions List satisfy the listing criteria and whether there is a need to submit a listing request to the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL/Da'esh and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee.

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is another significant issue. During the Council's last open briefing on Afghanistan in December 2024, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher called for the Council to support efforts to reduce aid obstruction and restrictive measures. Members could hold an informal meeting with humanitarian actors to discuss possible steps the Council could take in this regard.

Council Dynamics

Although Council members are generally united in their desire to see a prosperous, peaceful Afghanistan free from terrorism and ruled by an inclusive government, they are divided over how to achieve this goal. Some members, including the P3 (France, the UK, and the US) and other like-minded states, have previously argued that the Taliban must adhere to international norms in order to obtain international recognition and receive economic and development aid from the international community.

China and Russia, on the other hand, have contended that the international community should provide assistance to Afghanistan without linking it to other issues, such as human rights, and appear to prefer dialogue and engagement without any increased pressure. Russia has reportedly decided to remove the Taliban from its list of designated terrorist organisations and, in December 2024, the lower

house of Russia's parliament approved a bill intended to pave the way for such a move.

The divide among Council members has been evident during recent negotiations concerning Council products. During the negotiations on the 27 December 2024 press statement, China apparently expressed initial opposition and suggested that it would not participate in negotiations, however, it later engaged with the text after Russia provided comments. In addition, it seems that some members, including France, pushed for the inclusion of stronger language on WPS and human rights in the text.

Council members have not been able to agree on the penholdership on the Afghanistan file since Japan—which held the pen in 2024—ended its two-year Council term in December 2024. Two pairs of Council members have indicated that they are willing to work together as co-penholders—China and Pakistan on the one hand, and the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the US on the other. Members held closed consultations to discuss this issue on 10 February, following a request from Algeria.

This disagreement appears to have complicated the negotiations concerning the renewal of UNAMA's mandate. In early February, China and Pakistan proposed a draft resolution on the renewal of the mandate. This was followed by the ROK and the US presenting an alternative text the next day. It seems that neither draft proposed substantive changes to UNAMA's mandate, and that the difference between the two texts was the inclusion of preambular language on human rights and other issues in the ROK/US draft and a change to UNAMA's reporting cycle in the China/Pakistan draft. On 21 February, China, in its capacity as Security Council president in February, presented a consolidated text combining some elements of the two drafts. At the time of writing, it appears that Council members have agreed to work on this consolidated draft.

Next month's quarterly meeting will mark the first time that new Council members Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama, and Somalia deliver statements on Afghanistan since joining the Council. Pakistan, which regularly participated in meetings on UNAMA under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure prior to joining the Council, is expected to be particularly active on the file moving forward.

Lebanon

Expected Council Action

In March, Council members expect to receive a briefing in consultations on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1701. Adopted in 2006, resolution 1701 called for a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah. The Secretary-General's report, which is due on 11 March, will cover the period from 21 October 2024 to 20 February. Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert and Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix are the anticipated briefers.

Council members will be following regional developments, including in Lebanon and Israel, and will assess whether additional Council action is required.

The mandate of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) expires on 31 August.

Key Recent Developments

A cessation-of-hostilities arrangement between Israel and Lebanon entered into effect on 27 November 2024 following more than 13 months of hostilities, primarily involving Israel and Hezbollah. The arrangement, which was brokered by the US and France, says that Israel will not carry out any offensive military operations against Lebanese targets in the territory of Lebanon and that the Lebanese government will prevent Hezbollah and all other armed groups from conducting operations against Israel. Under the terms of the arrangement, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) will also dismantle unauthorised infrastructure and confiscate unauthorised arms, among other tasks. The arrangement outlines a 60-day deadline for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to withdraw south of the Blue Line and, in parallel, for the LAF to deploy to positions south of the Litani River. (The Blue Line is a withdrawal line set by the UN in 2000 to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon. While not representing an international border, the Blue Line acts in practice as a boundary between Lebanon and Israel in the absence of an agreed-upon border between the two states.)

According to Israeli media reports, also cited by Lebanese news outlets, the US bilaterally provided additional guarantees to Israel with respect to the ceasefire implementation, including recognising "Israel's right to respond to Hezbollah threats".

On 26 January, the day of the expiration of the 60-day period stipulated in the cessation-of-hostilities arrangement for the IDF withdrawal and LAF deployment, Israel and Lebanon agreed to an extension of the deadline until 18 February following concerns expressed by both parties that the respective withdrawal and deployment were progressing too slowly. Hours before the extension of the deadline, Israeli forces in several southern Lebanon locations opened fire on demonstrators who were demanding Israel's withdrawal, some of whom were reportedly carrying Hezbollah flags. At least 22 people were killed and 124 were injured, including six women and an LAF soldier, according to an article by the Associated Press that cited Lebanese health officials.

On 9 January, the Lebanese Parliament elected former LAF Commander Joseph Aoun as President of the Republic, ending a prolonged political stalemate. On 13 January, Aoun designated Nawaf Salam, former President of the International Court of Justice, as Prime Minister. Salam announced the formation of a new

government on 8 February.

In a 16 January presidential statement, the Security Council welcomed the election of Aoun and Salam's designation. It also welcomed the cessation-of-hostilities arrangement, expressed concern about reported violations, and called for all violations to stop.

By mid-February, the IDF had withdrawn from areas in southern Lebanon broadly corresponding to Sector West of UNIFIL's area of operations, where the LAF had deployed, often in coordination with UNIFIL. In areas in southern Lebanon that remained under Israeli control, the IDF continued to target Hezbollah's military assets. According to a 13 February statement by UN independent experts, during its operations, Israeli forces had also targeted civilians attempting to return to their homes, demolished housing, and destroyed crops and infrastructure with tanks, bulldozers and heavy weaponry.

On 14 February, a UNIFIL convoy transporting peacekeepers to Beirut airport was attacked, a vehicle set on fire, and several peacekeepers were injured. In a statement issued on the same day, Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the attack and called for accountability. The attack took place following a decision by Lebanese authorities to revoke permission for two Iranian flights to land in Beirut. According to an article by the Associated Press, the decision "came after the Israeli army issued a statement claiming that Iran was smuggling cash" to Hezbollah via civilian flights, "leading some in Lebanon to allege that their country's authorities had caved in the face of a threat from Israel". A group of people aligned with Hezbollah who were protesting the decision along the airport road was reportedly involved in the attack. A Hezbollah official later denied the group had any involvement in the incident.

The incident occurred against the backdrop of Hezbollah's loss of military power and political influence in Lebanon following the war with Israel and the ousting of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, which has led to the loss of a key military supply route for Hezbollah from Iran through Syria.

On 18 February, the expiration date for the extended deadline for the IDF withdrawal and LAF deployment, the IDF withdrew from most areas under its control in southern Lebanon. It retained, however, a presence in five positions in Lebanese territory near the Blue Line. Announcing its decision regarding the five positions, the IDF reportedly said on 17 February that it will remain there "until Israel is certain that Hezbollah will not return to the area south of the Litani River". In a joint statement on 18 February, Aoun, Salam, and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri stressed "the urgent need for Israel's full withdrawal from occupied Lebanese territory" and announced that they would appeal to the Security Council to "compel Israel's immediate withdrawal" and to enforce resolution 1701.

During a media briefing on 18 February, Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Stéphane Dujarric said that the LAF was continuing to deploy throughout southern Lebanon with UNIFIL's support, and displaced communities were returning to their homes.

In an apparent reference to the IDF's decision to retain a presence in Lebanese territory, Hennis-Plasschaert and UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander Lieutenant General Aroldo Lázaro said in a statement, that "[a]nother delay" in the process of implementing the cessation-of-hostilities arrangement was not what they had "hoped would happen, not least because it continues a violation"

Lebanon

of resolution 1701. The statement added, however, that the delay should not “overshadow the tangible progress” achieved since the cessation of hostilities came into force.

In an 18 February statement, France called on all parties to accept its proposal that UNIFIL, including the mission’s French contingent, deploys to the five positions to replace the IDF. At the time of writing, the proposal has apparently not been officially taken up. Analysts have observed that the IDF’s presence in Lebanese territory could reinvigorate Hezbollah’s rhetoric about the need for an armed movement in Lebanon to resist Israel’s encroachment.

The funeral of Hezbollah’s former Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, who was killed in an Israeli airstrike in September 2024, took place on 23 February. In a recorded message played during the funeral, Hezbollah’s Secretary-General Naim Qassem reportedly said that “the resistance will continue” based on “new developments and the current period”, while also stressing that “it is now the responsibility of the state” to ensure Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanese territory.

In January, Lebanese Judge Tarek Bitar resumed the investigation into the 4 August 2020 Beirut port explosion, which had been stalled for several years because of political interference and legal challenges.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 16 January statement addressing his recent visit to Syria and Lebanon, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk expressed solidarity with the people of both countries. He conveyed hopefulness about Lebanon’s future, noting signs of new beginnings despite “immense challenges” ahead, and accentuated the critical importance of the ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel. Türk offered the assistance of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to support the Lebanese authorities’ commitments to undertake reforms to strengthen the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary and efforts to hold to account those responsible for the Beirut port explosion. Among other things, he noted that Israeli military action in Lebanon “caused wide-scale loss of civilian life”, raising “serious concerns” about the respect for the principles of proportionality, distinction, and precaution. He also stressed the need for the ceasefire to transition into a durable peace and for a renewal of the social contract in Lebanon.

Women, Peace and Security

In a dialogue facilitated by UN Women during Guterres’ 16-19 January visit to Lebanon, women’s rights activists and representatives of feminist civil society organisations emphasised the importance of Lebanon’s recovery, reconciliation and reconstruction efforts to be gender-responsive and inclusive. They also called for the implementation of policies that ensure women’s equal participation in political decision-making processes, including municipal elections in May and parliamentary elections expected in 2026.

Key Issues and Options

Ensuring the full implementation and sustained adherence to the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah remains the

Security Council’s foremost immediate priority.

Council members could consider issuing a press or presidential statement that:

- Urges all parties to fully implement the cessation-of-hostilities arrangement, resolution 1701, and the Security Council’s previous relevant resolutions;
- Demands the swift withdrawal of the IDF from all the positions it occupies in Lebanese territory and the prompt deployment of the LAF;
- Expresses support for the French proposal to deploy UNIFIL troops to the five positions occupied by the IDF;
- Calls on the international community to provide support to the LAF so that it can effectively implement its side of the cessation-of-hostilities arrangement and resolution 1701;
- Stresses the importance of protecting civilians and civilian infrastructure, guaranteeing the safety and security of UNIFIL peacekeepers, and fully adhering to international law; and
- Encourages reforms to promote socioeconomic recovery.

Council Dynamics

Council members agree on the need for the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah to hold and on the importance of guaranteeing safety and security for UNIFIL peacekeepers.

There are sharp differences in Council members’ views of Hezbollah. Some members distinguish between Hezbollah’s political and military wings and have only designated its military wing as a terrorist organisation; other members, including the UK and the US, have listed Hezbollah in its entirety as a terrorist organisation. On the other hand, Russia sees Hezbollah as a legitimate socio-political force in Lebanon.

In December 2024 and January, Council members discussed the possibility of a Council visiting mission to Lebanon, spearheaded by Algeria. It appears that most members supported this proposal. The US, however, argued that a visit could undermine progress towards implementation of the cessation-of-hostilities arrangement, an assessment that was apparently not shared by any other Council member.

France is the penholder on Lebanon. The US chairs the mechanism tasked in the cessation-of-hostilities arrangement with monitoring, verifying, and assisting in “ensuring enforcement” of the commitments outlined in the arrangement. It is a reformulated version of the tripartite mechanism established following the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, which consisted of representatives of UNIFIL, the IDF, and the LAF, and was chaired by UNIFIL. Under the terms of the cessation of hostilities, the revised mechanism also includes France and is hosted by UNIFIL.

Sudan

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council is expected to hold a briefing on the work of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee. One or more additional meetings on Sudan could be held in March depending on developments, given the unstable situation in the country.

Key Recent Developments

Heavy fighting continues in Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) (led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the head of the Sudanese Transitional Sovereign Council) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Since launching its offensive in late September 2024, the SAF has made progress in reclaiming strategic locations in Khartoum and surrounding areas from the RSF. The SAF has 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. On 23 February, the SAF announced that it had broken the RSF's siege of El-Obeid, the capital of North Kordofan state and an important commercial and transportation centre, and that it had retaken Al-Qutaynah city, which is located roughly 73 kilometres south of Khartoum.

On 9 February, Sudan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a press statement indicating that it was initiating a road map to pave the way for an "inclusive political process that will culminate in holding free and fair elections" and include the establishment of an "all-inclusive national dialogue" and a technocratic cabinet.

On 22 February, the Rapid Support Forces signed a political charter in Nairobi with affiliated armed groups and other anti-government political actors to establish a parallel government in the territories it controls in Sudan. In a 24 February statement attributable to his spokesperson, Secretary-General António Guterres expressed deep concern about the political charter, maintaining that it constitutes a "further escalation in the conflict...[that] deepens the fragmentation of the country and risks further entrenching the crisis". He further asserted that preserving Sudan's unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity "remains key for a sustainable resolution of the conflict and the long-term stability of the country and the wider region".

The RSF has continued its siege of El-Fasher in North Darfur. Fighting in and around the Zamzam camp for internally displaced people, which is located near El-Fasher and is home to nearly 500,000 people, has been particularly intense. On 25 February, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, or Doctors Without Borders) announced that it was forced to halt its operations in the Zamzam camp, saying that the current escalation of attacks and fighting is "making it impossible" for MSF to continue providing medical assistance in "such dangerous conditions", notwithstanding the "widespread starvation and immense humanitarian needs" in the IDP camp.

On 26 February, Director of the Operations and Advocacy Division at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Edem Wosornu briefed the Council in the open chamber. She gave a dire assessment of the humanitarian situation in Sudan: 12 million people are currently displaced; 24.6 million people are experiencing acute hunger; health services have collapsed; and

children are being deprived of formal education. Wosornu called on the Council to take immediate action to protect civilians in Sudan and ensure that international humanitarian law is adhered to by the parties. She also called for funds to support the humanitarian needs of Sudan, underscoring that the "scale of Sudan's needs is unprecedented and requires an equally unprecedented mobilization of international support".

Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Sudan Ramtane Lamamra briefed members in the closed consultations that followed Wosornu's briefing. During the consultations, Lamamra apparently underscored the need for a political solution to the conflict, noting the need for coordinated international and regional efforts in this regard. He also highlighted the need for the protection of civilians and unfettered humanitarian access.

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 the time of writing. At the time of writing, 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.

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.

On 17 February, the Security Council adopted resolution 2772 extending the mandate of the Panel of Experts (PoE) assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee until 12 March 2026.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue is for members related to sanctions to build trust and develop a common understanding on how to most effectively manage the Sudan sanctions regime. Council members may wish to have a substantive discussion in an informal meeting about the sanctions measures, including, but not limited to, the geographic scope of the sanctions (which are currently limited to Darfur), the designation criteria, and potential adjustments to the sanctions measures.

An overarching issue for the Council remains how to support efforts to achieve a sustainable ceasefire across Sudan. As hostilities persist, mediation efforts have consistently failed to achieve any meaningful breakthroughs.

To address the ongoing crisis, the Council 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

UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2772 (17 February 2025) extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts (PoE) assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee until 12 March 2026. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9869** (26 February 2025) was a meeting on Sudan.

Sudan

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.

Council Dynamics

Several Council members have emphasised the need for a ceasefire, unfettered humanitarian access, respect for international humanitarian law, and the importance of protecting civilians in the conflict. In the 26 February Council meeting, many members expressed concern about the RSF's political declaration calling for a parallel government in Sudan. Algeria, speaking on behalf of the A3 Plus (Algeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Guyana) said this declaration was detrimental to peace, calling it a "dangerous step that fuels further fragmentation" of Sudan. In addition, some members, such as Algeria (on behalf of the A3 plus) and Russia, welcomed the roadmap announced by the Sudan government during the meeting. Although some members, such as the US and UK, are highly critical of both the SAF and the RSF for

violating international law in the conflict, members such as China and Russia tend to be more sympathetic to the Burhan-led government, underscoring its sovereign authority and its efforts to protect civilians and coordinate the delivery of humanitarian aid.

The Sudanese government has criticised Kenya for hosting an RSF meeting on 18 February and the subsequent signing ceremony on 22 February. Critics have suggested that the Kenyan government's decision to provide a venue for the RSF may have been influenced by a \$1.5 billion loan agreement that it is expected to receive from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which has reportedly provided military support to the RSF during the conflict.

Council members have differing views on the use of sanctions in Sudan. This was reflected during the negotiations on resolution 2772 of 17 February. Similar to 2024, the most contentious part of the negotiations was the duration of the mandate. The A3 plus—together with China, Russia, and Pakistan—supported a request by Sudan to extend the Panel's mandate for six months, in order to align its mandate with the renewal of the 1591 Sudan sanctions regime, which occurs in September. While the mandate was ultimately renewed for one year, the resolution was not unanimously adopted, as China and Russia both abstained.

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

UNDOF (Golan)

Expected Council Action

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

UNDOF's mandate, which is typically renewed every six months, expires on 30 June 2025.

Background and Key Recent Developments

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

On 20 December 2024, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2766, renewing UNDOF's mandate for another six months. The mandate renewal came shortly after Israeli troops entered the demilitarised zone following the fall of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad earlier that month and a statement from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declaring that the disengagement agreement had "collapsed". A 13 December UNDOF press statement confirmed a "significant increase in Israel Defence Forces (IDF) movements within the area of separation and along the ceasefire line" in direct violation of the 1974 Disengagement Agreement.

The Secretary-General's most recent report on UNDOF's activities, dated 2 December 2024, noted that the ceasefire between Israel

and Syria generally held during the reporting period of 21 August to 18 November 2024. It raised concerns, however, that violations of the 1974 agreement persisted at a time of heightened tensions and escalation in the region. The report preceded Assad's ouster and the Israeli deployments into the buffer zone. The upcoming UNDOF report, due 12 March, is expected to cover these developments.

Israel has cited security concerns, including the need to protect residents in northern Israel, as the reason for its operations within the buffer zone. Although Israel had initially indicated that its presence in the area would be temporary, Defence Minister Israel Katz said on 28 January that the IDF would remain in the buffer zone "indefinitely". During a 16 February meeting with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Netanyahu spoke of preventing Iran from establishing a "new terror front" near the Golan Heights, stressing that "if any other force in Syria today believes that Israel will permit other hostile forces to use Syria as a base of operations against us, they are gravely mistaken. Israel will act to prevent any threat from emerging near our border in southwest Syria".

Commenting on Israel's presence in the buffer zone, Syrian interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa has emphasised that Syria remains committed to the 1974 agreement and is ready to welcome UN forces to "restore conditions to their prior state". On 24 February, Netanyahu raised demands for the complete demilitarisation of southern Syria and affirmed that Israel would not allow any Hayat Tahrir al-Sham—the Security Council-listed terrorist group which led Assad's ouster—or Syrian forces to enter the area south of

UN DOCUMENTS ON UNDOF Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2766 (20 December 2024) renewed the mandate of UNDOF for six months until 30 June 2025. **S/RES/350** (31 May 1974) established UNDOF. **Secretary-General's Report S/2024/875** (2 December 2024) was the Secretary-General's 90-day report on UNDOF, covering the period 21 August 2024 to 18 November 2024. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9840** (17 January 2025) was a meeting on UNIFIL and UNDOF.

UNDOF (Golan)

Damascus. Following reported Israeli airstrikes in southern Syria on 25 February, Katz stressed that “any attempt by the Syrian regime forces and the country’s terrorist organizations to establish themselves in the security zone in southern Syria - will be met with fire.”

Satellite images published in Haaretz have revealed that the IDF has built at least seven new outposts in the area of separation since December—including on Mount Hermon, where UNDOF maintains the UN’s highest elevation permanently staffed position. Residents in the Golan have reportedly said that Israeli soldiers have prevented them from accessing their own homes, displaced residents, raided houses, and fired upon protesters demonstrating against the IDF’s presence, raising fears of occupation. Concerns have also been raised regarding locals’ access to the Al-Mantara Dam, which is a vital water source for the region.

On 17 January, the Security Council held a briefing on UNDOF and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Russia requested the meeting to address the latest developments in the respective areas of operations. Head of the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) Major General Patrick Gauchat, who was also Interim Head of UNDOF at the time, briefed the Council on how UNDOF’s operations have been impacted. He confirmed that the IDF remained present in the area of separation, carrying out construction work and setting up communications equipment, while also highlighting that UNDOF’s operational movements in the area of separation have been affected by their presence. Gauchat also informed the Council that local residents appealed to UNDOF for assistance regarding disruptive IDF actions in their communities, including roadblocks, damage to roads, and searches in villages. He added that the UNDOF was liaising with the IDF and Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs on these issues, and there had been positive exchanges and progress in this regard.

On 11 December 2024, the Secretary-General announced the appointment of Major General Anita Asmah of Ghana as Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNDOF.

Key Issues and Options

In light of the significant shift in security dynamics in the Golan and increased challenges for UNDOF, a key issue for the Council is how to address ongoing violations of the 1974 agreement and obstructions preventing the mission from carrying out its mandate.

One option is to hold an informal interactive dialogue with key actors so that Council members can learn more about the extent of the IDF’s presence in the area of separation and how it is impacting the peacekeepers, including their safety, security, and freedom of movement. Council members may be interested in hearing more

about the level of liaison among UNDOF, the Israeli authorities, and the Syrian caretaker authorities.

An issue for the Council is that the significant Israeli presence in the buffer zone could pose the risk of an escalation between the parties that might imperil the ceasefire between Israel and Syria. Members may consider issuing a press statement urging the parties to uphold international law and their obligations under the 1974 agreement, underscoring that there should be no military forces or activities in the area of separation, other than those of UNDOF. The statement could also express concern over risks posed to local civilian populations by violations of the 1974 agreement and call upon the parties to ensure that UNDOF is accorded the ability to operate safely and securely and is allowed to operate freely in accordance with the agreement.

Council and Wider Dynamics

The unanimous adoption of resolution 2766 on 20 December 2024, which reauthorised UNDOF’s mandate for six months, illustrated that the Council remains united in its view that UNDOF plays an important role in regional stability. Despite historical divisions in the Council regarding the Syria file and opposing positions of the UNDOF co-penholders—Russia and the US—about who holds sovereignty over the Golan, the two countries continue to consider UNDOF as a separate issue on which they agree.

Recent actions by the IDF and statements by Israeli officials, however, may lead to a greater divergence over Israel’s actions and presence in the Golan Heights. Following the adoption of resolution 2766, Algeria emphasised in a statement the illegality of the Israeli presence in the area of separation, noting that it violates the disengagement agreement and Security Council resolutions, and raised questions about the occupation of Syrian territory.

During the Council’s monthly Syria meeting on 12 February, several Council members expressed concerns regarding Israel’s presence in the area of separation, including Algeria speaking on behalf of the A3 Plus group (Algeria, Guyana, Sierra Leone and Somalia), China, Denmark, France, Slovenia, Pakistan, and Russia.

On the other hand, in its statement, the US noted its concerns about reports of “newly formed groups in Syria that are inciting violence, including by seeking to draw Israel into direct conflict” and that it claimed are financially and logistically supported by Iran. During that meeting, the Iranian representative described the claims as baseless and urged the Security Council to take decisive actions to address Israel’s presence in Syria.

The US and Russia are co-penholders on the UNDOF file.

UN Peacekeeping

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council will hold a high-level open debate on “Ensuring adaptability in UN Peace Operations—responding to realities”. Denmark’s Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, will chair the meeting, which is a signature event of Denmark’s Council presidency this month. The briefers may include Secretary-General António Guterres and a civil society representative.

Key Recent Developments

The future of UN peace operations has been a key topic of discussion in recent years, particularly with the drawdown and departure of several UN peacekeeping operations and special political missions. The abrupt departure of MINUSMA in 2023 sent shockwaves through the UN system, followed by the exit of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) in February 2024. The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) is set to leave the country by the end of this year. Similarly, the UN Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS), which replaced the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) in November 2024, is expected to transfer responsibilities to the UN country team by October 2026 and phase out. Additionally, the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), one of the remaining large UN multidimensional peacekeeping operations, is implementing a disengagement plan agreed upon with the Congolese government in November 2023.

In light of these developments, discussions surrounding the drawdown, reconfiguration, and termination of UN peace operations have taken on increased importance and urgency. The Secretary-General’s *A New Agenda for Peace* emphasised that “[e]xit strategies and transitions from peace operations need to be planned early and in an integrated and iterative manner to achieve successful mission drawdowns and ensure that gains are consolidated and the risk of relapse into conflict or escalation is minimized”. In this context, the UN Transitions Project, which was initiated in 2014 with the involvement of relevant UN departments and entities to provide coherent support for transition planning and management, is revising its existing guidance, policies, and mechanisms.

Beyond issues of drawdown, reconfiguration, and termination, the future of UN peace operations was also a key focus during the Summit of the Future in September 2024. In this regard, member states adopted the *Pact for the Future*, the outcome document of the summit, which, among other things, requested the Secretary-General to: “undertake a review of the future of all forms of United Nations peace operations, taking into account lessons learned from previous and ongoing reform processes, and provide strategic and action-oriented recommendations for the consideration of Member States on how the United Nations toolbox can be adapted to meet evolving needs, allowing for more agile, tailored responses to existing, emerging, and future challenges”.

In November 2024, the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) released an independent study that it commissioned, titled, *Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities*. The study was conducted by Wane; Paul D. Williams, Professor of International Affairs at the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University; and Ai Kihara-Hunt, Professor at the Graduate

Program on Human Security, the University of Tokyo. The study presents 30 different models for future peacekeeping, encompassing a wide range of traditional and new tasks. It is now expected to inform discussions at the next Peacekeeping Ministerial, which will be hosted by Germany in May.

These discussions about transitions and the future of UN peace operations are also closely tied to the peacebuilding and the sustaining peace agenda. The upcoming review of the UN peacebuilding architecture, set to take place this year, holds particular significance in this context. (For background, see the *In Hindsight* in our February *Monthly Forecast*.) Conducted every five years, the review aims to strengthen global peacebuilding efforts. The *Pact for the Future*, adopted by world leaders in September 2024 as the outcome of the Summit of the Future, reaffirms member states’ commitment to “strengthening the Peacebuilding Commission through the 2025 review of the peacebuilding architecture to bring a more strategic approach and greater coherence and impact to national and international peacebuilding and sustaining peace efforts.”

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the role of regional peace support operations in carrying out peace enforcement or counter-terrorism operations. The adoption of resolution 2719 on 21 December 2023, which addresses the financing of African Union (AU)-led peace support operations (AUPSOs), has provided renewed momentum to this emerging trend. The UN and the AU have been consulting on the implementation of this landmark resolution and developed a joint AU-UN roadmap to implement resolution 2719, which was adopted during the UN-AU annual high-level conference in Addis Ababa in October 2024. Discussions are also ongoing about potential cases to be considered by the Security Council under resolution 2719, with Somalia serving as the first test case. On 27 December 2024, the Security Council adopted resolution 2767, authorising the deployment of the AU Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), which replaces the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), whose mandate was terminated. The Security Council is expected to decide on the financing of AUSSOM later this year.

Key Issues and Options

How to adapt peace operations in a rapidly changing conflict landscape is a key issue for the Council; The March open debate offers member states an opportunity to engage on this vital and topical issue and should provide an overview of their perspectives in the lead-up to the Peacekeeping Ministerial in Berlin, the review of peace operations requested in the *Pact for the Future*, and the 2025 review of the UN peacebuilding architecture.

A related issue is how the Council can shape the future of UN peace operations. One option is for Council members to have a series of thematic debates this year aimed at developing their ideas around the future of peacekeeping. There also appears to be a lack of clarity regarding the Secretary-General’s approach to conducting the review, with relevant departments in the Secretariat holding differing views on the process. Similar to DPO, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs seems to be planning a separate study, specifically focusing on special political missions. Members could ask the Secretary-General to provide regular updates on the review during

UN DOCUMENTS ON PEACEKEEPING Security Council Resolution S/RES/2719 (21 December 2024) was on the financing of AUPSOs. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9719 (9 September 2024) was an open debate on UN peacekeeping operations. General Assembly Resolution A/RES/79/1 (22 September 2024) was the *Pact for the Future*.

UN Peacekeeping

consultations or at their monthly lunches with him.

In discussing the future of peace operations, a key issue for Council members is how to better prepare to support peace operations across the full peace continuum while remaining agile and flexible in response to changing security situations. An option would be to request the Working Group on Peacekeeping to discuss what the Council can do to achieve this objective.

The Council could also adopt a presidential statement highlighting the pertinent action points raised during the debate that could be used as inputs to the peace operations review.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Peace operations remain a crucial tool for the Security Council in fulfilling its primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. Shifting geopolitical dynamics and the evolving nature of conflict, however, have presented significant challenges to peacekeeping operations. Additionally, growing frustration among host countries and communities over the perceived ineffectiveness of UN peace operations has further complicated the operating environment.

Discussions about the peacekeeping budget are expected to become more complex with the return of the Trump administration. Based on past experience, this could lead to calls for a reduction and eventual exit of UN peacekeeping operations, pushing them to achieve more with fewer resources. In this context, the US may use the open

debate to clarify its policy approach to peacekeeping operations.

The US may also clarify its position on the implementation of resolution 2719 and the upcoming discussions on the financing of AUSSOM. The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman, Senator James Risch, recently made it clear that resolution 2719 should not be used to fund AUSSOM, arguing that doing so “would lock the US into perpetual funding through its dues to the UN,” which he stated would be a disservice to the American taxpayer. In 2023, the three African members known as the A3 (then Gabon, Ghana, and Mozambique) played a pivotal role in spearheading the adoption of resolution 2719. However, it was difficult for the “A3 Plus” Grouping (then Algeria, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Guyana) to secure a clear commitment for the financing of AUSSOM under resolution 2719 during the negotiations in December 2024. This could potentially change with Somalia, the host country, being part of the “A3 Plus” grouping this year.

This year, three elected members—Denmark, Pakistan, and the Republic of Korea—seem eager to promote discussions on peacekeeping within the Council. Pakistan, as one of the top five troop-contributing countries to UN peacekeeping, has a strong interest in the matter. The Republic of Korea is also expected to continue chairing the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations in 2025, pending the finalisation of the appointment of chairs for subsidiary bodies.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

The fighting between the Congolese armed forces (FARDC) and the *Mouvement du 23 Mars* (M23) has escalated since early January, with the M23 significantly expanding its territorial control in North Kivu and capturing Goma, the provincial capital. More than 3,000 people have been killed in this latest round of fighting, which has displaced many others. The humanitarian situation has also worsened due to the disruption of critical infrastructure and basic services. The M23 declared a unilateral humanitarian ceasefire on 4 February, but fighting resumed in South Kivu, with the group making further military advances southward.

Council members met three times in January and once in February to discuss the unfolding security situation in eastern DRC. (For more information, see our 15 January, 25 January, 28 January, and 19 February *What's in Blue* stories.) The situation also prompted a flurry of diplomatic activities in Africa, with the African Union (AU) and several regional economic communities holding emergency meetings to discuss the matter. Nonetheless, these meetings

have had little impact on the situation on the ground, as the M23 continued to advance in South Kivu, capturing Bukavu, the provincial capital, by mid-February.

MONUSCO withdrew from South Kivu in June 2024, following the disengagement plan agreed with the Congolese government in 2023. The FARDC and allied militias reportedly had retreated from the area. Burundian forces, initially deployed in eastern DRC under a bilateral agreement with Kinshasa to target Burundian dissident groups, later joined the fight against the M23 alongside the FARDC but are now reportedly withdrawing from South Kivu.

Meanwhile, media reports indicate that Ugandan forces have entered Bunia, the capital of Ituri province. Uganda has forces deployed in eastern DRC under a separate bilateral agreement with Kinshasa to combat the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an armed group affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh). The presence in the DRC of troops from various countries in the region and the heightened tensions among key actors have raised concerns that the situation could escalate into a wider conflict.

On 21 February, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2773 on the situation in eastern DRC, which, among other things, demands the immediate cessation of further military advances by the M23, calls for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, and expresses the Council's readiness to consider additional measures against those who contribute to the continuation of the conflict in eastern DRC. (For more, see our 21 February *What's in Blue* story.)

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2773 (21 February 2025) was on the situation in the eastern DRC. S/RES/2765 (20 December 2024) renewed MONUSCO's mandate until 20 December 2025. S/RES/2746 (6 August 2024) authorised MONUSCO to provide operational and logistical support to SAMIDRC. Security Council Press Statement SC/15982 (26 January 2025) was on the situation in the DRC.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 6 February press release, UN experts expressed concern over urgent protection needs and the dire living conditions of displaced civilians in the eastern DRC, voicing alarm at reports of indiscriminate attacks and summary executions. With the security situation compounded by widespread looting of humanitarian facilities and denials of humanitarian access, they appealed to the international community to augment efforts and funding to support the DRC government to protect and assist displaced persons. They also emphasised the need for proper investigations and accountability for the violations committed. Among other recommendations, the experts echoed the Secretary-General's appeal for Rwanda to cease support to the M23 and withdraw from DRC territory.

On 7 February, the Human Rights Council (HRC) held its 37th special session on the DRC's human rights situation. The special session was convened per the DRC's request on 3 February, supported by 27 member states of the Human Rights Council and 21 observer states. During the session, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk stressed that the situation is "trapping civilians in a spiral of violence". He called on all parties to lay down their weapons and resume dialogue within the framework of regional peace processes. Surya Deva, Chair of the Coordination Committee of the Special Procedures, and Keita, among others, also called for all parties to adhere to obligations under international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law and emphasised the need to restore lasting peace, respectively.

At the session's conclusion, the HRC adopted a resolution (A/HRC/37/L.1) establishing a fact-finding mission on the human rights abuses and IHL violations committed in the provinces of North and South Kivu. It further established an independent commission of inquiry to continue the work undertaken by the fact-finding mission after the fact-finding mission presents its comprehensive report at the 80th session of the UN General Assembly.

Women, Peace and Security

In a 3 February statement, Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten condemned the renewed offensive carried out by the M23 with the support of the Rwandan Defence Force in eastern DRC. She expressed grave concern about the heightened risk and emerging reports of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) in the area and urged all parties to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law. Patten emphasised the importance of ensuring that survivors of CRSV have access to comprehensive multisectoral services and urged the parties to return to diplomatic talks and comply with the relevant Security Council resolutions on CRSV, including resolutions 1888, 2106 and 2467.

In a 4 February press briefing, the Director of UN Women in Geneva and Chief of Humanitarian Action, Sofia Calltorp, similarly expressed deep concern about the situation of women and girls in eastern DRC. Among other recommendations, she called for enhancing prevention, protection, and response mechanisms for sexual and gender-based violence and for ensuring women's participation in peace negotiations and decision-making.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for Council members in March is the security situation in eastern DRC. Members will be watching developments closely and could choose to issue a press or presidential statement reiterating the importance of implementing resolution 2773 in this regard.

A related issue is the humanitarian and human rights situation in the region. At the 19 February meeting, Council members heard accounts of serious human rights violations and abuses—such as summary executions, including of children, and conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence in eastern DRC—following the rapid deterioration of the security situation. A possible option for Council members is to request a briefing from the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

How to support ongoing regional efforts to find a lasting solution to the conflict in eastern DRC through diplomatic means will

remain a major preoccupation for Council members. In March, they are likely to discuss the recent decisions by the AU and its regional mechanisms to address the situation in eastern DRC. They may also reaffirm the need to ensure the necessary coordination and complementarity among the various regional mediation initiatives and support the convening of a second quadripartite summit by the AU, including all the relevant regional mechanisms involved in finding a solution to the crisis in eastern DRC. (The quadripartite process was initiated by the AU at a summit in June 2023 and involved the East African Community, the Economic Community of Central African States, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and the Southern African Development Community.)

MONUSCO's disengagement process remains an ongoing issue for Council members. In line with resolution 2765 of 20 December 2024, which last renewed the mission's mandate, MONUSCO and the Congolese government are expected to submit a tailored strategy to the Council by 31 March for a gradual, responsible, and sustainable withdrawal, considering the evolving conflict dynamics and protection risks. The development of this strategy, however, is likely to have been overtaken by the latest developments in eastern DRC, which are likely to force both the mission and the Congolese government to reassess the issue from a new perspective.

Being able to provide logistical and operational support from MONUSCO to the Southern African Development Community Mission in DRC (SAMIDRC), pursuant to resolution 2746 of 6 August 2024, is also an issue. It seems that the casualties sustained by SAMIDRC during the latest round of fighting have caused significant concern among its troop-contributing countries. In March, Council members may wish to seek updates on MONUSCO's coordination with SAMIDRC and its support for the force, considering the new realities on the ground.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members remain extremely concerned about the security and humanitarian situation in the eastern DRC. They all seem to agree that the solution to this long-standing issue is political, and they continue to support regional efforts. The role of external actors in the eastern DRC, however, has been a divisive issue among Council members. With the latest developments on the ground, many Council members are now openly calling for external actors to stop supporting armed groups in the eastern DRC, but the "A3 Plus" grouping (Algeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Guyana) has been cautious in line with the decisions of the AU and its regional mechanisms, which do not explicitly reference Rwanda's role. In the negotiations on resolution 2773, in light of the rapidly deteriorating security situation in eastern DRC, the A3 Plus came under pressure to reconsider its position. Among this grouping, Guyana was the first to support the draft text, which called on "the Rwanda Defence Forces to cease support to the M23 and immediately withdraw from DRC territory without preconditions"; ultimately, the other members of the A3 Plus also voted in favour of the resolution facilitating its unanimous adoption.

It seems that MONUSCO is in a challenging position, with its peacekeepers facing restrictions on their freedom of movement. This will likely impact the mission's ability to carry out its mandated

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tasks. There appear to be ongoing internal discussions within the Secretariat regarding short-, medium-, and long-term scenarios for the mission in the face of the unfolding situation in eastern DRC. Currently, Council members seem to be focused on responding to the current situation but are likely to pay closer attention to this issue in the coming months.

SAMIDRC's situation in eastern DRC also appears to have

sparked a domestic backlash in South Africa. A key troop-contributing country (TCC) to SAMIDRC, South Africa, has reportedly sent reinforcements after 14 of its soldiers were killed in North Kivu but has hinted at a potential drawdown, depending on the implementation of decisions adopted at the regional summits. Malawi, another TCC, has already decided to withdraw its troops from eastern DRC.

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Expected Council Action

In March, the members of the Security Council may discuss the Secretary-General's 24 February letter containing strategic recommendations on the UN role in support of Haiti. Members might evaluate options for Council action to implement the Secretary-General's recommendations.

The mandate of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) expires on 15 July, and the authorisation of the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission to Haiti ends on 2 October.

Background and Key Recent Developments

After the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021, Haiti descended into a multidimensional crisis characterised by political deadlock, extreme violence, and dire humanitarian conditions. Armed gangs have overrun an estimated 85 percent of Port-au-Prince, the capital, employing tactics such as murder, kidnapping, and sexual violence against the civilian population amid widespread impunity. The country also continues to suffer from a governance crisis as elections have not taken place since 2016.

According to the Human Rights Service (HRS) of BINUH, in 2024, a total of 5,626 people were killed and 2,213 injured as a result of gang violence, self-defence groups, and operations by the Haitian National Police (HNP), representing a 26 percent increase in the number of casualties compared to 2023. The HRS also recorded 1,494 kidnappings for ransom by gangs in 2024.

The instability has caused widespread displacement and acute food insecurity. In a 14 January update based on data collected from 1 November to 30 December 2024, the International Organization for Migration recorded over 1,041,000 internally displaced people in Haiti, equivalent to 9 percent of the country's population.

The situation of children in Haiti remains critical. In a 7 February statement, UNICEF spokesperson James Elder reported a "staggering" 1,000 percent rise in sexual violence against children from 2023 to 2024. He also cited a 70 percent increase in child recruitment into armed groups in 2024, noting that up to half of the gangs' members are children, some as young as eight. Elder added that many children are forcibly recruited while others "are manipulated or driven by extreme poverty". A recent Amnesty International report on the impact of gang violence on children documented the recruitment and use of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and killings and injuries of children—three of the six grave violations determined by the Security Council—noting that these abuses have

been perpetrated primarily by gang members. The report also highlighted concerns expressed by interviewees in Haiti about being targeted by self-defence groups and the police because of perceived affiliation with gangs.

The Secretary-General added Haiti as a situation of concern in his 2023 annual report on children and armed conflict. The 2024 annual report subsequently contained, for the first time, information on violations committed against children in the country.

In October 2022, the Haitian government appealed for the immediate deployment of an "international specialised force" to temporarily reinforce the efforts of the HNP to combat gangs. Secretary-General António Guterres endorsed the request, recommending that "[o]ne or several Member States, acting bilaterally at the invitation of and in cooperation with the Government of Haiti", deploy a rapid action force to support the HNP. In July 2023, Kenya agreed to lead a multinational force to the country, and several other countries—primarily from Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean—subsequently stated their intention to participate in the force.

Although the UN would not be administering the proposed mission, Kenya, Haiti, and other stakeholders sought Security Council authorisation for the deployment. In October 2023, the Council adopted resolution 2699, authorising member states to form and deploy the MSS mission to Haiti under Kenya's leadership. The resolution, which authorised the mission for an initial period of 12 months, specified that the cost of the operation would be borne by voluntary contributions and support from individual countries and regional organisations. In September 2024, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2751, renewing the mission's authorisation for one year.

Funding for the MSS has, however, regularly failed to meet the mission's estimated annual cost of approximately \$600 million. The number of deployed personnel has also fallen short of the 2,500 officers envisaged in its Concept of Operations, with approximately 1,000 officers deployed at the time of writing.

On the ground, violence and insecurity remain pervasive, with the HNP and the MSS reportedly being "stretched thin on several simultaneous battle fronts" against gangs. The first MSS casualty was registered on 23 February when a Kenyan soldier died from injuries sustained in an operation in the Artibonite region.

In October 2024, the president of Haiti's Transitional Presidential Council, Leslie Voltaire, addressed a letter to the Secretary-General requesting that the MSS be transformed into a UN peacekeeping mission "as soon as possible".

UN DOCUMENTS ON HAITI Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2752 (18 October 2024) renewed the sanctions regime on Haiti imposed by resolution 2653 of 21 October 2022. S/RES/2751 (30 September 2024) renewed the authorisation for member states to deploy the MSS to Haiti for one year. S/RES/2743 (12 July 2024) renewed BINUH's mandate for one year, until 15 July 2025.

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In October and November 2024, Council members negotiated a draft resolution proposed by the US and then-Council member Ecuador—the Council’s co-penholders on Haiti at the time—that would have directed the Secretary-General to initiate planning to transform the MSS mission into a UN peacekeeping operation. The draft resolution was opposed by China and Russia, however, which referred to, among other issues, the chequered history of past UN peacekeeping operations in Haiti and reiterated their position that the country’s political and security conditions were not conducive to a new operation. As a compromise, the Council sent a letter on 29 November 2024 requesting the Secretary-General to provide strategic recommendations on the full range of options for UN support for Haiti, incorporating lessons learned from previous UN missions, political developments in Haiti, and the MSS mission.

The Secretary-General responded to the Council’s request in a letter dated 24 February. He noted that transforming the MSS into a peacekeeping operation is not currently a feasible option. The Secretary-General added, however, that such an option “could be considered” once gang control has been substantially reduced.

The letter said that the medium-term focus should be to “substantially reduce gangs’ territorial control in the capital, the Artibonite Department, and over critical infrastructure—ports, airports, and national roads”. To achieve this goal, the Secretary-General suggested adopting a two-pronged strategy: the first would focus on enabling the MSS with UN logistical and operational support, and the second would focus on enhancing BINUH’s capacity to implement its mandate and take on new responsibilities.

Regarding the first prong, the Secretary-General suggested establishing a UN Support Office, funded by peacekeeping assessed contributions. A key function handled by the Support Office would be the provision of comprehensive logistic and operational support to the MSS, such as accommodation, life support (food, fuel, and water), mobility support, medical capability, and IT support. Assessed funding would cover the MSS’ logistical and operational support, while scaled-up bilateral voluntary contributions from UN member states would cover forms of support for the MSS that the UN cannot provide, such as stipends, military-grade capabilities, and lethal equipment.

The letter proposes the following other functions for the UN Support Office:

- Provision of “a limited, non-lethal support package” to the HNP that would be funded mostly through voluntary contributions;
- Strengthened intelligence and analytical capabilities for the MSS and HNP in conducting joint operations, such as a joint operations centre and unmanned aerial vehicles for surveillance, that would be financed by peacekeeping assessed contributions;
- Establishing implementation capacity for the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy, to be funded through peacekeeping assessed funds.

Regarding the second prong, the Secretary-General proposed that BINUH focuses on such priorities as the design and support of “defection and safe exit programmes” including for children, youth, and women forcibly recruited by gangs; supporting the Haitian authorities in handling the detention of high-risk individuals; and enabling the Haitian authorities to “implement UN sanctions, notably the arms embargo”, including through the creation of a UN

Integrated Sanctions Support Unit within BINUH.

In his letter, the Secretary-General acknowledges that the proposed UN support options are based on a set of “[a]ssumptions and [r]equirements”, including “significant investment from the peacekeeping budget” as well as scaled-up voluntary contributions. Specifically, the letter says that the “viability of UN logistical and operational support depends on whether Member States provide sufficient voluntary contributions to address the MSS mission’s gaps in personnel, military-grade equipment, and lethal assets”. In this regard, the Secretary-General called for strengthened member state leadership through the establishment of “a standing group of partners” that could, among other things, secure voluntary contributions required to procure the support that the UN cannot provide.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 3 January press release, the UN Designated Expert on Human Rights in Haiti, William O’Neill, expressed deep concern over attacks by gangs on hospitals and healthcare workers perpetrated in December 2024. Noting that only 37 percent of health facilities in Port-au-Prince are fully functional, he underscored that the attacks “debilitated a system that was already near collapse”. O’Neill said that gang members’ “repeated threats to attack health premises indicate that these are intentional assaults on the health care system” and appealed to the international community to do “everything it can” to support the Haitian authorities to combat insecurity and guarantee the right to health.

In a 7 January press release, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk identified impunity for human rights violations, corruption, and entrenched economic and social inequalities as among the drivers of Haiti’s multidimensional crisis, and called on the national authorities, with the support of the international community, to undertake “[a]dditional efforts” to address these issues. Türk emphasised the need for logistical and financial support for the MSS mission and called on the HNP to reinforce its oversight mechanisms for human rights violations by the police. Noting that “[w]eapons flowing into Haiti often end up in the hands of the criminal gangs”, he called for the full implementation of the Security Council’s sanctions regime—including the arms embargo—as a crucial tool to prevent the supply of firearms and ammunition to Haiti.

Key Issues and Options

The Security Council’s overarching objective in Haiti is to support the country’s political transition and assist international and domestic efforts to stem the surge in gang violence, with the ultimate aim of restoring security conditions conducive to holding elections and addressing the root causes of the country’s instability.

How to respond to the proposals contained in the Secretary-General’s 24 February letter is likely to be the key issue for the Security Council in March. The Council may convene a meeting to discuss the appropriate course of action. One option would be to adopt a resolution operationalising the Secretary-General’s proposals for the creation of a Support Office and for enabling BINUH to better implement its mandate and assume new responsibilities.

When addressing the situation in Haiti during his 19 February remarks at the Opening Ceremony of the Caribbean Community’s 48th Regular Meeting of Heads of Government, Guterres stressed the importance of tackling “the weapons and drug trafficking that is fuelling violence across the region”, including through “address[ing] the countries of origin and the countries of destination”. The resolution could also demand that UN member states, in particular countries in the region, step up their efforts to ensure the full

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implementation of the arms embargo.

Additionally, the Council could invite O'Neill and a representative of Haitian civil society to provide an update on the human rights situation in the country in a closed Arria-formula meeting format to allow for frank discussion.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their concern about Haiti's multidimensional crisis and generally agree on the need to tackle escalating gang violence and its impact on civilians. Views also converge on the importance of a Haitian-led political solution that addresses both security and socioeconomic challenges.

Views have varied, however, on appropriate Council responses to address the situation. Proposals to transform the MSS into a UN peacekeeping operation have been contentious, with France, the UK and the US expressing support for this course of action at different points. Panama also noted the "advisability of considering the possible transformation" of the MSS into a peacekeeping operation during the most recent Council meeting on Haiti, which was held on 22 January. Conversely, China and Russia have opposed this option during past negotiations on Haiti.

As part of larger cuts to development aid programmes undertaken by the new US administration of President Donald Trump, the US has partially frozen funding to Haiti, including its contribution to the UN-administered trust fund for the MSS. (The trust fund, which was established pursuant to resolution 2699, collects voluntary contributions for the overall support for the MSS.)

The US and Panama are the co-penholders on Haiti.

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