

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

In April, France will hold the presidency of the Security Council.

The quarterly open debate on “[The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question](#)” is expected to be elevated to ministerial level this month. French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Noël Barrot is expected to chair the meeting. UN Secretary-General António Guterres is the anticipated briefer. Other meetings on this issue may be convened depending on developments in Israel and Gaza.

[UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#) Filippo Grandi will brief the Security Council in April, focusing on challenges related to forced displacement across the globe.

There will also be an open briefing on the implementation of resolution 2730 of 24 May 2024 on the [protection of humanitarian personnel and UN and associated personnel](#) and their premises and assets. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Tom Fletcher and Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security Gilles Michaud are the anticipated briefers.

Additionally, the Security Council will hold its annual briefing with the heads of military components of [UN peacekeeping](#) operations. The anticipated briefers are Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and the heads of military components of two UN peacekeeping operations: Force Commander of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) Lieutenant General Ulisses de Mesquita Gomes and Head of Mission and Force Commander of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) Major General Aroldo Lázaro Sáenz.

Other Middle Eastern issues on the programme in April are:

- [Yemen](#), monthly meeting on developments; and

- [Syria](#), monthly meeting on political and humanitarian issues.

Several African issues are on the programme in April, including:

- [West Africa and the Sahel](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS);
- [Somalia](#), a private meeting on the situation in the country;
- [Western Sahara](#), consultations on the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO);
- [South Sudan](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the mandate renewal of UNMISS;
- [Great Lakes Region](#), briefing and consultations on the implementation of the 2013 Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Great Lakes; and
- [Libya](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and the work of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee.

Two issues on the Americas are on the programme:

- [Colombia](#), briefing and consultations on developments in the country and the work of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia; and
- [Haiti](#), briefing and consultations on developments in the country, including the work of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH).

Regarding European issues, a briefing is planned on the work of the UN Interim Administration Mission in [Kosovo](#) (UNMIK).

As in past months, there may be one or more meetings on [Ukraine](#).

Other issues could be raised during the month, including [Myanmar](#) and [Sudan](#), depending on developments.

1 April 2025

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In Hindsight: Ensuring Effective Peace Operations in an Uncertain World

Introduction

This year, peace operations are expected to receive increased attention in the Council, with three elected members—Denmark, Pakistan, and the Republic of Korea (ROK)—forming a “peacekeeping trio” initiative. On 24 March, Denmark hosted an open debate on “Ensuring adaptability in UN Peace Operations”. Pakistan and the ROK may follow suit during their upcoming presidencies in July and September, respectively. This is a change from recent years, where the annual meeting on peacekeeping reform, held each September in line with resolution 2378 of 20 September 2017, has been the only formal platform in the Council for such thematic discussions.

In addition, the Secretary-General is expected to begin conducting a review of UN peace operations, as requested by the *Pact for the Future*—the outcome document of the September 2024 Summit of the Future—against the backdrop of expectations that there may be a strong push from the US to cut costs and do more for less.

This month’s *In Hindsight* explores emerging trends and ongoing reform efforts in UN peace operations amidst shifting and challenging geopolitical dynamics. It also previews upcoming discussions at the 2025 Peacekeeping Ministerial in Berlin and the review of UN peace operations.

The State of UN Peace Operations

The last time the Council created a new peacekeeping operation was in 2014. A decade ago, the UN had 16 peacekeeping operations with 107,088 peacekeepers. However, following the drawdown and exit of several peacekeeping missions, this number has decreased to 11 peacekeeping operations with 61,197 peacekeepers in 2025. Large multidimensional missions, such as the UN/AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), closed in 2020 and 2024, respectively. The UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), one of two remaining large UN multidimensional peacekeeping operations, is implementing a disengagement plan agreed upon with the Congolese government in November 2023.¹ With the dramatic deterioration of the security situation in eastern DRC since January, the future of the mission appears to be uncertain. Some Council members have expressed concern about the future of the mission, and the US apparently requested a strategic review of options for MONUSCO during the 11 March closed consultations on the DRC.

Some of the more traditional and longstanding UN peacekeeping missions, such as the UN Disengagement Force (UNDOF) in the Golan and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), are also facing difficulties in fulfilling their respective mandates in the face of active hostilities in their areas of operation. (For more, see our 17 January *What’s in Blue* story.) With rare exceptions, renewing the mandate of these missions has traditionally been a routine affair as Council members have generally been supportive.² Nonetheless, addressing the obstacles preventing these missions from fully implementing their mandates is a major challenge, and developments in their areas of operation could affect Council dynamics.

The number of Special Political Missions (SPMs) has not changed from a decade ago. While four have closed, SPMs have been established in Colombia, Haiti, Yemen, and Sudan. However, there are signs of a downward trend. The UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) closed in February 2024 and 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 be phased out.

In recent years, there has been growing pressure during mandate renewal negotiations for the removal of thematic and cross-cutting language on human rights; women, peace and security (WPS); and climate, peace and security, among other matters. In this regard, China and Russia have maintained that certain thematic issues are not relevant to the Council’s work and that their inclusion in the mandates of peace operations is unwarranted or even problematic. This trend could become even more pronounced in the coming period, with the new US administration possibly assuming positions that align more closely with China and Russia on these issues.

During this year’s annual negotiations of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping (C34), the US apparently proposed several changes related to WPS, international humanitarian law, and mis- and disinformation, while other members opposed altering agreed language that had been negotiated over many years. As a result, C34 concluded its work this year without reaching an agreement on its annual report, which serves as a repository of language on peace operations. Although there have been instances of failure to adopt an annual C-34 report in the past (for example, in 2019 and 2022), this latest setback is likely to make the work of the C34 more difficult in the coming years.

A New Generation of Action for Peacekeeping

Since 2018, the UN has been implementing the Secretary-General’s Action for Peacekeeping initiative (A4P), a set of commitments agreed by UN member states to reform and strengthen UN peacekeeping. In 2021, marking the third anniversary of A4P, the UN launched A4P+, which was meant to accelerate the implementation of A4P across seven key priority areas and two cross-cutting themes.³ The Department of Peace Operations (DPO) has so far released six biannual reports to highlight progress and challenges in implementing A4P+.

Its latest report, published in February, highlights the difficult environment in which UN peace operations are operating amid ongoing geopolitical tensions. Peacekeepers also continue to face increasing risks to their safety and security, although, according to the report, fatalities have remained relatively low in recent years partly because of measures to mitigate the impact of explosive ordinances and enhance casualty evacuation (CASEVAC) procedures, among others. Last year, five UN personnel—four military personnel and one civilian staff—were killed in targeted attacks.

UN peace operations have also increasingly become targets of mis- and disinformation and hate speech, according to the A4P+ report.

¹ The others are the UN Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

² China and Russia abstained on resolution 2695 which renewed UNIFIL’s mandate on 31 August 2023.

³ A4P+ has seven key priority areas—collective coherence behind a political strategy, strategic and operational integration, capabilities and mindsets, accountability to peacekeepers, accountability of peacekeepers, strategic communication, and cooperation with host countries—and two cross-cutting themes—women, peace and security, and innovative, data-driven, and technology-enabled peacekeeping.

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At a 19 February Council meeting, for instance, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the DRC and Head of MONUSCO Bintou Keita explained how anti-MONUSCO sentiment in eastern DRC is being stirred up through such means. This underscores the need for enhanced strategic communications in UN peace operations, a means to create better awareness of their role and mandate among local populations. Additionally, missions continue to engage with host countries to improve their operating environment and address various restrictions against them in violation of Status of Force Agreements, which have been an issue in recent years.

These and other A4P+ priorities have been a major focus of the UN Secretariat in the last seven years. While implementation of some A4P+ priorities has been encouraging— including the increase in the percentage of women in senior mission leadership, the decline in the number of fatalities, and the improvement in mission coordination with host governments—peacekeeping operations are also facing other broad, systemic challenges. Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix described these challenges in a 2 September article in *Foreign Affairs Magazine*. First, the nature of conflicts has changed, which underscores the need for UN peace operations to adapt to evolving peace and security threats. Second, UN peace operations are not getting the necessary support from UN member states. This is even more so in the Security Council, whose members are increasingly polarised. “Without more coordinated support from member states, missions are often limited to doing damage control—preventing conflicts from spiralling out of control rather than resolving them”, Lacroix underscored.

In recognition of these factors, the Department of Peace Operations is in the early stages of working on new ideas for peacekeeping. It seems that DPO intends to gather input from member states, including during the 2025 Peacekeeping Ministerial.

2025 Peacekeeping Ministerial

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Leaders’ Summit on Peacekeeping, a high-level meeting held in September 2015 to discuss the challenges of peacekeeping in which several UN member states pledged to reform and strengthen peacekeeping efforts by committing troops, police, and other resources. The peacekeeping Ministerial was initiated in 2016 as a follow-up to the Leaders’ Summit, with London, Vancouver, New York, Seoul, and Accra hosting the peacekeeping ministerial in 2016, 2017, 2019, 2021 and 2023, respectively.

This year, Germany will host the peacekeeping ministerial in Berlin from 13-14 May. In the lead-up to the Berlin ministerial, two preparatory meetings took place in Montevideo and Jakarta in December 2024 and February, respectively, and a third preparatory meeting is scheduled for April in Islamabad. An independent study commissioned by DPO on the *Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities* was produced to inform the meeting. Released in November 2024, the study presents 30 different models for the future of peacekeeping, covering a broad spectrum of both traditional and emerging tasks.

Aside from member states making substantial pledges to address capability gaps, the Berlin meeting is expected to provide an opportunity to explore the models proposed by the independent study on shaping the future of UN peace operations. The study has garnered

mixed reactions from member states, with some expressing scepticism about the feasibility of some of the proposed models, such as cybersecurity and maritime security. However, others see it as a good basis for discussions of potential new missions and how these models would be implemented in practical terms.

Review of Peace Operations

A decade after the latest review of UN peace operations, the UN is expected to embark on another review process this year. Unlike the last review, this one will be done in-house by the UN Secretariat. The review is expected to begin soon and is likely to involve a series of consultations with all the relevant stakeholders, including the Security Council, the relevant intergovernmental bodies of the General Assembly, the wider UN membership, troop and police contributing countries, host countries and civil society organisations. The 24 March Security Council debate provided an opportunity for the wider membership to share their views on what they expect from the review.

It seems that the Secretary-General would like to submit the outcome of the review before the end of the 80th session of the UN General Assembly next year. The ongoing Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR) is expected to be completed by the end of 2025 with the adoption of twin resolutions by the Security Council and the General Assembly. There are likely to be overlapping elements in the two reviews, given that peacebuilding is an integral part of many peace operations, and members may be interested in how this will be handled going into the peace operations review.

Observations

Peace operations are among the Council’s most crucial tools, serving as a visible demonstration of its efforts to promote international peace and security. However, ensuring their continued relevance requires addressing several key issues. In this regard, restoring the necessary trust and consensus within the Council, especially among the permanent members, appears to be paramount. While this is easier said than done in the current geopolitical environment, it remains essential to provide political support to peace operations to enable them to fulfil their mandates effectively.

Another key issue is how to address the gap between expectations and what peace operations can realistically deliver on the ground. This gap seems to be one of the factors behind the crisis of host state consent and the frustration felt by local communities in recent years. Council members may need to enhance their efforts towards adopting realistic and achievable mandates that align with the needs and expectations of host states and their communities. In addition, enhancing strategic communications remains crucial to address the challenges posed by misinformation and disinformation targeting peace operations while also fostering a better understanding of their mandate among host states and their communities.

Aligning mandates with the resources and capabilities available to peace operations has also been a persistent challenge, which will be more pronounced with the increasing calls for cost efficiency and effectiveness. This could potentially create some convergence between the US, which under the current administration is likely to emphasise the “need to find value, not just financial value,” and China, the second-largest financial contributor to the peacekeeping budget,

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which has been advocating for the rationalisation and optimisation of resources in peace operations. This means that the coming period could be more challenging for peace operations to fulfil their mandates in a significantly resource-constrained environment.

The discussion on the future of peace operations remains a major preoccupation in light of the Peacekeeping Ministerial and the upcoming review of peace operations. While the large multidimensional models may not be totally obsolete, discussions have focused on the idea of more nimble models that can adapt quickly to changing circumstances. This could include starting with smaller, more traditional peace operations with narrow mandates that include such tasks as monitoring ceasefires or cessation of hostilities agreements and adding on tasks as needed, as suggested in the independent study.

In spite of these challenges, ongoing efforts to resolve some of the most intractable conflicts of our time could lead to an opportunity to test some of the ideas about the future of peacekeeping. It appears that the Secretariat is quietly exploring possible scenarios in the

event that peace operations become an option in certain conflicts. It would be useful for Council members to seriously reflect on what sort of models might be most relevant and efficient in today's world. Members have a number of formats where they could express their views, including the Informal Working Group on Peacekeeping, the regular meetings of troop- and police-contributing countries ahead of mandate renewals, the Military Staff Committee, and the Group of Friends on Peace Operations.

UN peace operations are at a critical juncture, with significant decisions required regarding their future direction, as they face increasing scrutiny of their effectiveness and disagreements about their objectives. If peace operations are to have a positive future, Council members need to actively chart a path forward that continues to demonstrate the value of this crucial tool in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Status Update since our March Forecast

Bosnia and Herzegovina

On 6 March, Security Council members held closed consultations on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed. Russia requested the meeting in light of the BiH state court's sentencing of Republika Srpska (RS) President Milorad Dodik. On 26 February, the court ordered Dodik to step down from his role as RS president following indictments for defying the decisions taken by High Representative for BiH Christian Schmidt and sentenced him to one year in prison.

On 21 March, after the closed consultations on "The Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question", Council members discussed the situation in BiH under "any other business". Slovenia requested the meeting to address recent actions taken by the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska. Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas Miroslav Jenča briefed.

Afghanistan

On 10 March, the Council convened for an open briefing on the situation in Afghanistan (S/PV.9875). Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) Roza Otunbayeva and Co-Founder of the Ham Diley Campaign Azadah Raz Mohammad briefed. Afghanistan, India, Iran, and Kazakhstan participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure. The closed consultations that were scheduled to follow the open briefing were cancelled and did not take place.

On 17 March, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2777, which extended UNAMA's mandate until 17 March 2026.

EU-UN Cooperation

On 11 March, the Security Council held its annual briefing on 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" (S/PV.9876). At the meeting, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas provided her first briefing to the Council since assuming her role in December 2024.

Iran (Non-proliferation)

On 12 March, the Security Council held a private meeting on Iran (S/PV.9877). France, Greece, Panama, the Republic of Korea (ROK), the UK, and the US requested the meeting, citing Iran's increased production of highly enriched uranium. Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Mohamed Khaled Khiari briefed. Germany, Iran, the European Union (EU) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) also participated in the meeting under rules 37 and 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

Sudan

On 13 March, the Security Council held a briefing on the situation in Sudan (S/PV.9878). Denmark and the UK (the penholder on the file) requested the meeting to address the protection of civilians and the humanitarian consequences of the conflict, including implications for healthcare and reports of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), especially against women and children. Catherine Russell, the Executive Director of UNICEF, and Christopher Lockyear, the Secretary General of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, or Doctors Without Borders) briefed. Sudan and the United Arab Emirates participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

Counter-Terrorism

On 14 March, Council members issued a press statement condemning the 11 March terrorist attack on a passenger train travelling from Quetta to Peshawar in Pakistan (SC/16019). At least 25 Pakistani nationals were killed in the attack.

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Lebanon

On 17 March, Council members received a briefing in closed consultations on the Secretary-General's latest report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (S/2025/153). Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert briefed.

UNDOF (Golan)

On 19 March, Council members received a briefing in consultations on the work of the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Khaled Khiari briefed.

Sudan/South Sudan

On 17 March, Council members issued a press statement (SC/16022) condemning the detention of UN peacekeepers, the armed abduction of civilian personnel, and the looting of the logistics convoy of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a Sudanese paramilitary group. The statement expressed deep alarm over threats to the safety and security of peacekeepers and civilian personnel and reiterated that attacks against peacekeepers may constitute war crimes. It called for the RSF to be held accountable and for the immediate return of the UNISFA trucks and fuel. It further called on all parties to allow UNISFA to implement its mandated tasks without interference, including its support to the Joint Border Verification Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM).

On 18 March, Security Council members convened for closed consultations under the agenda item "Sudan/South Sudan". The US—supported by the Council's "A3 plus" members (Algeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Guyana)—requested the meeting to discuss the outbreak of violence in South Sudan and its implications for the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Another focus of the meeting was developments in the area of operations of UNISFA. Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations (DPPA-DPO) Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee briefed.

UN Peacekeeping

On 24 March, the Security Council held an open debate titled "Advancing adaptability in UN Peace Operations—responding to new realities" under the agenda item "Maintenance of international peace and security" (S/PV.9884). Denmark's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lars Løkke Rasmussen chaired the meeting, which was the signature event of Denmark's Council Presidency in March. Secretary-General António Guterres and Jenna Russo, the Director of Research and Head of the Brian Urquhart Center for Peace Operations at the International Peace Institute (IPI), briefed.

Ukraine

On 26 March, the Security Council held a briefing on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine at the request of France and Panama (S/PV.9886). Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya briefed the Council. The representatives of Finland, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Ukraine participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure. Head of the EU Delegation to the European Union (EU) Stavros Lambrinidis, and Paul Beresford-Hill, the Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the UN, participated under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

On 27 March, the Security Council held a briefing and consultations on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), including the work of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) (S/PV.9887). Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the DRC and Head of MONUSCO Bintou Keita and Secretary-General of the Danish Refugee Council Charlotte Slente briefed. Angola, Burundi, the DRC, and Rwanda, represented by its Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Olivier J.P. Nduhungirehe, participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

Protection of Humanitarian and UN Personnel

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council will hold an open briefing on the implementation of resolution 2730 of 24 May 2024, which concerns the protection of humanitarian personnel and UN and associated personnel and their premises and assets. France, the Council president for the month, is convening the meeting. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Tom Fletcher and Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security Gilles Michaud are expected to the brief. A civil society representative may also participate.

Background and Key Recent Developments

In recent years, the eruption and intensification of several conflicts around the world have exacerbated challenges to humanitarian action and threats faced by humanitarian personnel in conflict. According to the Aid Worker Security Database, 379 aid workers were killed in 2024, making it the deadliest year on record for humanitarian personnel. This continued a trend from 2023, during which 280 aid workers were killed, representing a 137 percent increase from the year before. The war in Gaza has fuelled a large share of the rising fatalities: between October 2023 and November 2024, 320 humanitarian personnel were killed there, the majority of whom worked for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

UN DOCUMENTS ON PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2730](#) (24 May 2024) was a resolution on the protection of humanitarian personnel and UN and associated personnel and their premises and assets. [Secretary-General's Report S/2024/385](#) (14 May 2024) was the Secretary-General's annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. [Security Council Letter S/2024/852](#) (22 November 2024) was a letter from the Secretary-General transmitting recommendations on measures to prevent and respond to attacks, violence, and threats targeting humanitarian personnel and UN personnel, as requested by resolution 2730 of 24 May 2024.

Protection of Humanitarian and UN Personnel

High levels of kidnappings, injuries, harassment, and arbitrary detention of aid workers were also reported in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Sudan, Ukraine, and Yemen, among other countries.

Recent incidents in several conflict situations worldwide illustrate the threats that aid workers continue to face in 2025. In late January, the Houthis in Yemen detained eight humanitarian personnel, one of whom—a World Food Programme staff member—died in detention on 10 February. In response, the UN decided to temporarily pause all operations 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 14 February, two humanitarian aid workers were killed in attacks on the Zamzam refugee camp in North Darfur State in Sudan. On 19 March, one staff member from the UN Office for Project Services was killed and six others were wounded when an Israeli tank reportedly fired on a UN compound in Gaza following the resumption of hostilities between Israel and Hamas. Similar to its response in Yemen, the UN announced that it would reduce its operational footprint in the territory, referring to the “intolerable risks” that its personnel face there. On 28 March, the Security Council held a private meeting on the humanitarian situation and protection of aid workers in Gaza.

In addition to direct threats of physical violence, humanitarian personnel face a range of obstacles to their work. According to the Secretary-General's most recent annual report on the protection of civilians (PoC)—which was issued on 14 May 2024 and describes the state of PoC in 2023—these challenges include bureaucratic and administrative impediments imposed by host states, such as restrictions on the recipients, timing, and type of aid provided, which violate humanitarian principles and may serve to politicise aid delivery. The report also cites misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech as a growing challenge that discredits humanitarian actors, undermines trust among local populations, and creates additional security risks for humanitarian personnel.

Resolution 2730—penned by then- Council member Switzerland—sought to address these issues. Among other provisions, the resolution recalls the primary responsibility of host states for the security and protection of UN and humanitarian personnel; expresses grave concern about the growing number of attacks, acts of violence, and threats against such personnel; recalls the obligation of all parties to armed conflict to comply with international humanitarian law (IHL); and underlines the obligations of all parties to armed conflict under IHL related to protecting civilians and civilian objects, including allowing and facilitating the rapid, safe, and unhindered passage of humanitarian assistance.

The scope of the resolution encompasses the protection of humanitarian and UN and associated personnel, including national and locally recruited personnel, and their premises and assets. It addresses several direct threats to their safety and security, such as the indiscriminate use of explosive devices, as well as indirect ones, including the spread of misinformation, and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to target humanitarian operations. It also condemns the unlawful denial of humanitarian access and the deprivation of civilians of essential objects, which impede relief efforts and exacerbate

conflict-induced food insecurity.

The resolution places a particular emphasis on accountability. It urges countries to conduct “full, prompt, impartial and effective” investigations of violations of IHL and international human rights law committed against humanitarian and UN personnel and to take action against those responsible, in accordance with domestic and international law, “with a view to reinforcing preventive measures, ensuring accountability and addressing the grievances of victims”. It also urges countries to prosecute persons allegedly responsible for serious IHL violations and to cooperate with domestic, regional, and international courts and tribunals “in accordance with States’ respective obligations”.

The resolution also established or expanded several reporting requirements for the Secretary-General. It asked him to submit to the Council, within six months, recommendations on measures to prevent and respond to attacks against humanitarian and UN personnel and to brief the Council on this matter no later than 12 months after the adoption of the resolution and on a yearly basis thereafter. Additionally, the resolution requested him to report “swiftly” to the Council when “widespread issues” regarding the safety and security of humanitarian and UN personnel occur, expressing the Council's intention to give its “full attention” to such situations.

The Secretary-General transmitted his recommendations to the Security Council in a letter dated 22 November 2024. Among other measures, he urged member states to reaffirm their obligations under international law, uphold humanitarian principles, and facilitate safe and unhindered access through streamlined procedures and humanitarian exemptions in counterterrorism frameworks. He also called for consistent condemnation of all attacks, strengthened oversight and accountability mechanisms, and responsible arms export practices. Additionally, he stressed the importance of survivor-centred approaches, including psychosocial support, contingency planning, and access to justice—particularly for national and locally recruited staff—and recommended integrating safety and security mechanisms into UN mandates and peace operations, including during mission transitions. The Council held a briefing on these recommendations on 26 November 2024.

Key Issues and Options

A central issue for the Council is how to reverse the sharp deterioration in the safety and security of humanitarian and UN personnel amid intensifying armed conflict, politicised humanitarian access, and a global erosion of respect for IHL. The unprecedented death toll among aid workers—particularly national and locally recruited staff—raises urgent questions about accountability, protection, and support systems, including mental health and survivor assistance. Another key concern is the growing use of misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech to delegitimise humanitarian work, compounding access restrictions, and heightening the risk to personnel. A further issue is chronic underfunding, which has brought the humanitarian system close to a breaking point as shrinking budgets force organisations to choose between staff safety and the delivery of life-saving assistance.

To address these challenges, Council members may wish to express support for the full and prompt implementation of resolution 2730 and the Secretary-General's recommendations. They

Protection of Humanitarian and UN Personnel

could issue a presidential statement or press statement reaffirming core principles—such as the obligation of all parties to comply with IHL and to protect humanitarian and UN personnel—and urging universal accession to international instruments such as the Convention on the Safety of UN and Associated Personnel and its Optional Protocol. Some members may propose a separate Council product condemning recent violence against aid workers in specific conflict situations and calling for investigations that meet the criteria of independence, impartiality, transparency, and effectiveness.

Members may also urge the Secretary-General to report to the Council on situations in which there are “widespread issues” regarding the safety and security of humanitarian and UN personnel, as requested by resolution 2730. They could invite survivors of attacks to participate in the Council’s annual briefings on the resolution, as the Secretary-General encouraged in his recommendations. Additionally, members might advocate for integrating security risk management, staff mental health support, and survivor assistance into the mandates and budgets of UN operations, especially in high-risk and transitioning mission settings. Members could also consider measures to strengthen implementation of resolution 2664 of 9 December 2022, which established a cross-cutting humanitarian exception to UN sanctions regimes.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Most Council members agree on the need to enhance the protection of humanitarian and UN personnel. Resolution 2730 garnered wide support, receiving 14 votes in favour and 90 co-sponsorships from the wider UN membership, demonstrating broad international concern

about this issue. Russia abstained on the resolution, however, objecting to its reference to international courts, its proposed parameters for ensuring humanitarian access, and its gender-related language.

At the November 2024 briefing, most members welcomed the Secretary-General’s recommendations and emphasised that all parties to conflict must respect IHL and facilitate humanitarian access. Many also welcomed the proposed survivor-centred approach and urged stronger action to combat misinformation and impunity. Several called for a recommitment to humanitarian principles and reinforced legal protections, emphasising that rhetoric must be matched by meaningful action. In this regard, some members stressed the urgency of addressing the targeting of UNRWA staff and the weaponisation of aid access in the Gaza Strip.

However, divisions remained on accountability mechanisms, the role of international courts, and the attribution of responsibility in specific contexts—particularly in relation to Gaza. The US supported calls for greater protection of humanitarian personnel and raised concerns about Israeli military conduct in Gaza, but stopped short of endorsing measures involving international accountability mechanisms, and it has since expressed full support for Israeli military operations after President Donald Trump returned to office and the ceasefire agreement between the parties collapsed. Russia affirmed the importance of humanitarian protection and the Geneva Conventions, but reiterated its scepticism about references to international courts in the Secretary-General’s recommendations, arguing that these mechanisms are politicised. It also criticised the omission of language on coordination with host governments and “unilateral coercive measures” in the Secretary-General’s letter.

West Africa and the Sahel

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

On 29 January, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger formally withdrew from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), concluding a year-long process following their announcement in 2024 of their intention to leave the sub-regional bloc. The three countries, led by military juntas that seized power through coups d’état, established the l’Alliance des États du Sahel (Alliance of Sahel States, or AES) in September 2023 as an organisation of collective defence. In March, the AES countries announced their withdrawal from Organization Internationale de la Francophonie (International Organisation of Francophonie), an organisation that promotes the French language and fosters cooperation among French-speaking nations.

In a communiqué adopted at the conclusion of its 66th Ordinary Session in Abuja in December 2024, the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government established a transitional

period until 29 July, during which the three countries could rejoin the bloc. Moreover, it directed the Council of Ministers to convene an Extraordinary Session in the second quarter of 2025 to determine the modalities of separation and to develop a contingency plan outlining the future political and economic relations between ECOWAS and the AES states.

The rise of terrorism and violent extremism continues to undermine security and stability in the Sahel. The region remains a hotspot for extremist groups, including al-Qaida affiliates and factions linked to the Islamic State and the Levant, which exploit weak governance, intercommunal tensions, and economic hardships to expand their influence and destabilise local communities. According to the 2025 Global Terrorism Index (GTI), published by the Institute for Economics and Peace, the Sahel accounted for 19 percent of all terrorist attacks worldwide and 51 percent of global terrorism-related deaths in 2024, up from 48 percent in 2023. Five of the ten countries most affected by terrorism are in the Sahel.

On 21 March, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) militants attacked the Fambita Mosque in southwestern Niger, killing at least 44 people and setting fire to a market and several homes. Council members condemned the attack in a 27 March press statement.

UN DOCUMENT ON WEST AFRICA AND THE SAHEL Security Council Press Statements SC/16032 (27 March 2025) condemned the 21 March terrorist attack in Niger. **SC/15980** (24 January 2025) condemned 8 January terrorist attacks in Benin.

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Beyond the Sahel, terrorist activity is increasing in coastal West Africa, with Benin and Togo witnessing an increase in attacks. Togo recorded ten attacks resulting in 52 deaths in 2024, with Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) claiming responsibility for four of these attacks, which accounted for 41 fatalities—up from 12 in 2023. The group also claimed responsibility for three attacks in Benin last year. On 8 January, terrorist attacks claimed by JNIM in northern Benin, near its border with Burkina Faso and Niger, resulted in the deaths of 28 Beninese soldiers. The attacks were strongly condemned by Council members in a 24 January press statement.

Several countries in West Africa are undergoing political transitions and preparing for key elections in 2025. In Guinea, the military junta led by Colonel Mamady Doumbouya, which seized power in a 2021 coup, agreed with ECOWAS on a ten-point roadmap for civilian rule and elections by late 2024. However, delays, lack of transparency, and insufficient funding have hindered progress. The junta's announcement of a constitutional referendum in the first half of 2025 has raised tensions, with the opposition accusing the junta of undermining the transition and escalating crackdowns on dissent.

On 26 March, Niger's military leader General Abdourahamane Tchiani, who seized power in a coup d'état in July 2023, was sworn in as president for a five-year transition period under a new charter that replaces the country's constitution. He was also promoted to the country's highest military rank of an army general and signed a decree dissolving all political parties. The new charter reportedly states that the five-year transition period is "flexible" and may be adjusted based on the country's security situation.

Côte d'Ivoire is set to hold presidential elections on 25 October. President Alassane Ouattara is currently serving a third term, which the opposition claims violates the constitution's two-term limit. Tensions escalated on 17 March when the electoral commission released the provisional voter list, excluding former President Laurent Gbagbo, former Prime Minister Guillaume Soro, and former Minister Charles Blé Goudé. Their disqualification, reportedly due to past criminal convictions, has sparked accusations of political exclusion, with opposition figures expected to challenge the decision.

In Togo, constitutional amendments introduced in 2024 are set to take effect on 6 May, transitioning the country from a presidential to a parliamentary system and consolidating executive authority under President Faure Gnassingbé, who will assume the new executive position of "President of the Council of Ministers". These changes, which allow him to extend his rule indefinitely as long as his party maintains parliamentary control, have sparked controversy. Gnassingbé has been in power since 2005, following the death of his father, President Gnassingbé Eyadéma.

Guinea-Bissau's presidential and legislative elections are scheduled for 30 November; however, the country has been embroiled in political turmoil. President Umaro Sissoco Embaló dissolved parliament in December 2023 following an alleged coup attempt and postponed elections originally planned for 2024. While the opposition contends that Embaló's term ended on 27 February, the Supreme Court ruled that it extends until 4 September, the date it validated his victory in 2020. ECOWAS' efforts to mediate have faltered, with a joint ECOWAS-UNOWAS diplomatic mission, deployed from 21 to 28 February, forced to leave on 1 March after Embaló threatened its expulsion,

rejecting regional interference. The opposition's boycott of the joint mission, citing bias, further hindered mediation.

Key Issues and Options

The rise of terrorism in West Africa and the Sahel region—particularly in the AES countries, which have been the epicentre of intensified terrorist attacks in the region—is a major concern for Council members. Over the years, terrorist groups have become more aggressive, leveraging increasingly sophisticated weaponry, including drones. The terrorist threat has progressively spread southward toward coastal states, raising alarm about potential spillover into previously unaffected regions. The growing link between terrorism and maritime crime is also a challenge that threatens to further destabilise the region.

Another significant issue for Council members is how to support the regional counter-terrorism security mechanisms—such as the Accra Initiative and the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad basin—in countering this threat. These mechanisms grapple with formidable challenges, including political instability, fragmented security coordination, and persistent funding deficits. Compounding these difficulties has been the withdrawal of Western military assistance, coupled with a shift toward alternative security partnerships—most notably with Russia.

Council members have also been concerned about the resurgence of unconstitutional changes of government, and they continue to closely follow ongoing political transitions in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger. In this connection, addressing structural conflict drivers in the Sahel, such as poor governance, under-development, and climate change, remains a major issue.

One option for the Council would be to request a briefing from the Secretary-General on possible avenues for enhancing security and governance in the Sahel region. He could brief Council members on the outcome of the assessment by the Independent High-level Panel on Security, Governance and Development in the Sahel (that is, the Issoufou Panel). The Panel was jointly launched by the UN, the African Union, ECOWAS, and the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S) in September 2022 under the leadership of the former president of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, to undertake a strategic assessment of "the underlying challenges in the Sahel, including the surge in violent extremism, growing fragility of the economies of the region due to the impact of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as complex political transitions". The Panel's report was discussed at the 8th UN-AU annual conference in October 2024, but Council members have not had the opportunity to be briefed about the report.

Council members may further consider organising an informal briefing to examine the inter-linkages between terrorism and maritime crime in the region, along with their implications for regional peace and security. The briefing could also address the growing use of sophisticated technology by terrorist groups in the region. The Council could also be briefed on security threats posed by climate change and the role of youth in addressing key regional challenges, including conflict, environmental changes, and political instability. This would offer an opportunity for Council members to gain a deeper understanding of these issues and explore potential strategies for addressing them effectively.

The humanitarian crisis in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, along

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with human rights violations by state and non-state actors, are also a major concern. Additionally, several Council members are troubled by ongoing restrictions on civic space and other human rights abuses. Council members could use the briefing as an opportunity to underscore the need for countries in the region to uphold international humanitarian and human rights law.

Council Dynamics

There is broad concern in the Council about the threat of terrorism and the dire humanitarian crises affecting West Africa and the Sahel. However, Council discussion on this region has been increasingly divisive in recent years. The US and European members are worried about Russia's growing influence in the region and its ties with the military juntas. While Russia supports the views of the AES countries in the Council, several members are concerned about developments in these countries. Sierra Leone, a West African country, and several other members believe it is important for the Council to maintain attention on the region, including how it might support regional efforts to combat the threat of terrorism and violent extremism.

A significant trend shaping regional dynamics in the Sahel is the growing political divide between Sahelian countries and Western powers, coupled with increasing reliance on non-traditional military partnerships, including mercenary groups like the Africa Corps (formerly Wagner Group), to combat insurgencies and consolidate

power. In late 2024, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal requested the withdrawal of French military forces from their respective territories, reflecting a pivotal shift in a region where France has long maintained a military presence.

The wars in Ukraine and Syria have also had implications for the Sahel. In 2024, reports surfaced that Ukraine's intelligence agency played a role in an ambush targeting Malian forces and Russia's Wagner Group, resulting in heavy casualties. Ukrainian intelligence later acknowledged its involvement. The attack reportedly involved Tuareg rebels and JNIM militants. In response, the AES countries severed diplomatic ties with Ukraine. In August 2024, Ukraine's incursion into Russia's Kursk region reportedly prompted Russia to recall around 100 paramilitary personnel from Burkina Faso to reinforce its domestic defences.

The collapse of Assad's government in Syria in December 2024 disrupted Russia's logistical operations, as it had relied on Syrian military bases as a key hub for its activities in Africa. In response, Russia shifted military assets from Syria to other regions, including eastern Libya. At the same time, it strengthened its military partnership with Mali's junta, delivering over 100 military assets earlier this year, including armoured vehicles, tanks, and weapon systems, reinforcing its influence in the Sahel.

Denmark and Sierra Leone are co-penholders on UNOWAS.

UN Peacekeeping

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council will receive its briefing from the heads of military components of UN peacekeeping operations. The anticipated briefers are Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and the heads of military components of two UN peacekeeping operations: Force Commander of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) Lieutenant General Ulisses de Mesquita Gomes and Head of Mission and Force Commander of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) Major General Aroldo Lázaro Sáenz.

Key Recent Developments

These force commander briefings, which have been held since 2010, focus on the operational challenges of implementing mission mandates. In July 2023, the UK convened the most recent of these briefings during its Security Council presidency. That meeting focused on the protection of civilians (PoC) and the role of the military components in preventing and responding to threats of physical violence. It featured briefings by Lacroix and the heads of military components of three UN peacekeeping operations: Force Commander of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Lieutenant General Mohan Subramanian, then Force Commander of MONUSCO Lieutenant General Otávio Rodrigues de Miranda Filho, and Lázaro Sáenz.

(For more, see our 27 July 2023 *What's in Blue* story.)

The Congolese government and MONUSCO agreed on a disengagement plan in November 2023. As part of this plan, the mission began to drawdown in June 2024 from South Kivu, one of the three provinces in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) where it had been operating. However, with the dramatic deterioration of the security situation in eastern DRC since January, the mission is under significant strain, with restrictions on its freedom of movement, among other difficulties.

On 21 February, the Security Council adopted resolution 2773, demanding the immediate cessation of further military advances by the Mouvement du 23 Mars (M23) rebel group in North Kivu and South Kivu provinces of eastern DRC and calling for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire. In this context, the Security Council urged the regional mechanisms actively involved in addressing the security situation in eastern DRC—the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC)—to cooperate closely with MONUSCO, given the mission's potential role in monitoring and implementing any future ceasefire agreement. Additionally, the EAC and SADC Council of Ministers, who met on 17 March in Harare, Zimbabwe, called on the UN to enhance MONUSCO's capacity to support the implementation of a "securitisation plan" for North Kivu and South Kivu provinces. (For more, see the Great Lakes brief in the April 2025 *Monthly Forecast*.)

UN DOCUMENTS ON UN PEACEKEEPING Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2773 (21 February 2025) was on the situation in the DRC. S/RES/2749 (28 August 2024) renewed the mandate of UNIFIL until 31 August. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9389 (28 July 2023) was a briefing by heads of military components of UN peacekeeping operations.

UN Peacekeeping

Some of the more traditional and long-standing UN peacekeeping missions, such as the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), are also facing enormous difficulties in fulfilling their mandates in the face of active hostilities in their areas of operation. The US and France brokered a cessation of hostilities agreement between Israel and Lebanon, which came into effect on 27 November 2024, following more than 13 months of hostilities primarily between Israel and Hezbollah. UNIFIL has adjusted its posture within its existing mandate to support the implementation of the cessation of hostilities arrangement. Resolution 1701 of 11 August 2006, which called for a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah, outlines the mission's mandate.

UNIFIL is working closely with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in the context of its deployment in southern Lebanon. However, its peacekeepers continue to operate at significant risk to their safety and security, and the mission remains restricted in its freedom of movement and access within its area of operations. Additionally, it continues to face resource constraints in carrying out its mandate. (For more, see our 17 January *What's in Blue* story.)

Another intractable crisis is the Sudan crisis. Council members have most recently reiterated their call on the parties to the conflict to seek an immediate cessation of hostilities and engage, in good faith, in political dialogue and diplomatic efforts towards a durable ceasefire through a 4 March press statement. Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Sudan Ramtane Lamamra has been engaging the parties in the search for a sustainable solution to the conflict through dialogue, although no tangible progress has yet been achieved. If and when that happens, however, there might be a need for a third-party force to monitor the implementation of a ceasefire or cessation of hostilities.

Key Issues and Options

An overarching issue for Council members is how UN peacekeeping operations can support ceasefires or cessations of hostilities. For example, in light of ongoing efforts to resolve the conflict in Ukraine and Gaza, members may be interested in an assessment of what role the UN could play in monitoring the implementation of a ceasefire or cessation of hostilities agreement. While the potential agreement in both situations appears distant, members may wish to draw on the experience of the force commanders in order to better understand what sort of mandate a mission would need to monitor ceasefires.

It appears that the Secretariat is quietly exploring various scenarios in anticipation of these and other developments. A possible option for Council members is to hold an expert-level briefing on some of these anticipated scenarios ahead of the meeting with the force commanders in order to have a more robust discussion about what lies ahead. This briefing is a public meeting but is usually held in an interactive format to allow the force commanders to supplement their briefings with responses to questions and issues raised by Council members. If members wish to have a closed discussion, they could meet with the force commanders in a private meeting format.

Another key issue is the multiple challenges confronting UN peacekeeping operations in carrying out their mandated tasks, including the risks to their safety and security and restrictions to their freedom of movement in violation of status of force agreements, among others. Council members could ask the heads of

military components for information about how they are tackling these challenges.

The future of UN peacekeeping remains a major issue for Council members. It was a topic of discussion at the 24 March open debate convened by the Danish Security Council presidency. (For more, see our 21 March *What's in Blue* story.) UN peacekeeping operations are facing significant challenges. They are adversely affected by a growing number of complex operating environments and divisions among the major powers. Over the past decade, several missions have departed, including large multidimensional operations in Mali and Sudan, and a drawdown process has been initiated in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). (For more, see our *In Hindsight* in the April 2025 *Monthly Forecast*.) As the appetite for larger, multidimensional peacekeeping operations has waned in recent years, there appears to be a growing interest in smaller, more nimble missions with narrow mandates to implement ceasefire or cessation of hostilities agreements.

As the Secretariat engages in efforts to conduct a review on peace operations, Council members could draw lessons from the force commanders on strategic objectives for peace operations, designing mandates, and monitoring the capacity to achieve them. They could also make a more concerted effort to receive military advice and operational information from force commanders, for example, by having them brief the Council alongside heads of missions.

Council Dynamics

UN peacekeeping is attracting attention in the Council in light of the 2025 UN Peacekeeping Ministerial, which will be held in Berlin on 13 and 14 May, and the review of UN peace operations requested by the *Pact for the Future* (the outcome document of the 2024 Summit of the Future), which is expected to begin soon and is intended to be finalised by August 2026.

Three elected members—Denmark, Pakistan, and the Republic of Korea (ROK)—are also working together this year as part of a “Peacekeeping Trio Initiative”. The three Council members intend to coordinate their efforts in support of peacekeeping. Following the 24 March open debate, Pakistan and the ROK are expected to convene meetings focused on peacekeeping during their upcoming presidencies in July and September, respectively. Additionally, Pakistan will be hosting a preparatory meeting in Islamabad on 15-16 April ahead of the Peacekeeping Ministerial. The ROK convened an informal dialogue between the Security Council and Peacebuilding Commission members on 27 March, which among other things, sought to emphasise the synergy between peacekeeping and peacebuilding, both of which are key priorities for the country.

There are indications that the new US administration may call for greater cost efficiency and effectiveness in peacekeeping. There could be growing pressure to cut the peacekeeping budget and have some missions begin a drawdown process. During closed consultations on the DRC on 11 March, the US apparently requested a strategic review of options for MONUSCO, which could signal its intention to consider cuts to this mission.

Kosovo

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council is expected to hold its first briefing this year on the situation in Kosovo. Special Representative and Head of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) Caroline Ziadeh will brief on recent developments and the Secretary-General's latest report.

Key Recent Developments

There has been no meaningful progress in the EU-facilitated dialogue on normalisation between Belgrade and Pristina. On 28 October 2024, Serbia adopted a draft law designating Kosovo as an “area of special social protection”, establishing a framework for providing financial assistance to certain groups in Kosovo with the stated aim of preventing social exclusion and supporting their survival. On the same day, the Serbian government adopted a separate bill on the organisation and jurisdiction of its judicial authorities, extending the competence of the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office and the High Court in Belgrade to prosecute criminal offences committed in Kosovo. Pristina condemned the measures, viewing them as an infringement on Kosovo's sovereignty.

Meanwhile, efforts to implement prior agreements have stalled. On 17 December 2024, former EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Miroslav Lajčák hosted talks in Brussels with Kosovo and Serbian negotiators, who reaffirmed their commitment to implement the 2023 Declaration on Missing Persons. However, Serbia's chief negotiator, Petar Petković, reportedly walked out of a meeting of the Joint Commission on Missing Persons scheduled for 15 January in protest against Pristina's closure of several parallel institutions in Kosovo earlier that day. (Parallel institutions refer to a network of administrative, educational, and healthcare structures in Kosovo administered and funded by Serbia that operate alongside structures affiliated with Pristina, often in areas with a significant ethnic Serbian population.)

According to Kosovo police, the closures—targeting post offices and banks—were carried out to establish “order and legality”. The EU criticised the move for being inconsistent with Kosovo's obligations under the EU-facilitated dialogue and emphasised that the status of Serbia-supported structures should be resolved through dialogue. Ziadeh also expressed concern about the action's impact on the daily lives of non-majority communities dependent on these institutions and urged a renewed commitment to the EU-facilitated dialogue.

The security situation in northern Kosovo has remained fragile. On 29 November 2024, a powerful explosion damaged a water canal in the northern municipality of Zubin Potok. Prime Minister of Kosovo Albin Kurti reportedly accused Belgrade of orchestrating the attack, which Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić dismissed as baseless. The Kosovo Security Council responded by approving emergency measures to increase security around strategic infrastructure while police announced arrests connected to the attack. Ziadeh condemned the attack, noting that it caused critical damage to essential civilian infrastructure and interrupted the water supply. She described the incident as deeply concerning and warned that it risks undermining stability. Ziadeh underscored the need for a comprehensive and transparent investigation to identify those responsible and hold them accountable.

Amid these developments, the European Council appointed Peter Sørensen on 27 January as the new EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue. Sørensen assumed this role on 1 February with an initial mandate of 13 months. On 6 February, he spoke separately with the Serbian and Kosovar chief negotiators and welcomed their invitation to visit Kosovo and Serbia.

On 9 February, Kosovo held parliamentary elections. Kurti's Lëvizja Vetëvendosje (LVV) party won approximately 42.3 percent of the vote, according to preliminary results, ahead of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), which secured 20.95 percent and 18.27 percent, respectively. Despite securing a clear plurality, LVV fell short of an outright majority and will need to form a coalition to govern. This contrasts with the party's previous term, during which it ruled alone following its 2021 electoral victory. In Serb-majority areas, Srpska Lista (Serbian List) claimed all ten parliamentary mandates reserved for the Serb community. Serbian President Vučić welcomed the result. Coalition negotiations remain ongoing in the aftermath of the election.

On 18 March, Albania, Croatia, and Kosovo signed a joint declaration on defence cooperation. In response to this agreement, Belgrade issued a statement criticised the pact as “a security threat to the Serbian people and the entire region” and a “direct contradiction to international law and UN Security Council Resolution 1244”. The following day, Pristina responded by condemning Belgrade's remarks as “aggressive and threatening,” further characterising them as “a blatant violation of the Brussels Agreements”.

Key Issues and Options

The Council's priority is to maintain stability in Kosovo and promote the de-escalation of tensions in the north. It will continue to monitor diplomatic efforts to advance the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and achieve the normalisation of relations between the two parties. To this end, the Council may wish to consider pursuing a presidential statement calling for restraint and reiterating support for the EU-facilitated dialogue as the primary framework for resolving outstanding issues. The Council could also express support for the newly appointed EU Special Representative and urge both Belgrade and Pristina to engage in good faith toward the resumption of normalisation talks. In addition, the Council could request the Secretary-General to conduct a strategic review of UNMIK to consider how to enhance the effectiveness of the mission.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Most Council members support the EU-facilitated dialogue to establish conditions for the normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Deep divisions among permanent members, however, continue to characterise the Council's approach to the issue.

Among the five permanent Council members, France, the UK, and the US recognise Kosovo's independence and tend to be supportive of its government; China and Russia do not recognise its independence and strongly support Serbia's position and its claim to territorial integrity. Six elected members (Denmark, Guyana, Pakistan, Panama, the Republic of Korea [ROK], and Slovenia) recognise Kosovo's independence, while two (Algeria and Greece) do not.

UN DOCUMENTS ON KOSOVO Secretary-General's Report S/2024/741 (14 October 2024) was on UNMIK. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9765 (30 October 2024) was the second regular briefing of the year on the situation in Kosovo.

Kosovo

Regarding the other two elected members, Kosovo maintains that Sierra Leone officially recognised its independence in June 2008. According to media reports, however, Serbia claimed in March 2020 that Sierra Leone had withdrawn its recognition, citing a note verbale on the matter from Sierra Leone's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Kosovo disputes the validity of the withdrawal. Somalia recognised Kosovo on 19 May 2010. On 4 January 2023, however, Vučić reportedly claimed that Somalia—along with eight other countries—had rescinded recognition. Kosovar authorities have also contested these claims.

The issue of modifying UNMIK's mandate with a view to its

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

Somalia

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council is expected to hold a private meeting to discuss the situation in Somalia. James Swan, the Special Representative for Somalia and Head of the UN Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS), is expected to brief.

The African Union (AU) is also expected to update the Council on the implementation of the AU Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) mandate in accordance with resolution 2767 of 27 December 2024. The resolution expressed the Council's intention to invite the AU, the UN Secretariat, and relevant international stakeholders to participate in a joint meeting on AUSSOM and UNTMIS.

Key Recent Developments

In recent months, Al-Shabaab, a terrorist group affiliated with Al-Qaida, has launched a series of deadly attacks across Somalia, continuing its violent campaign to destabilise the country and undermine government authority. These attacks have reportedly targeted both military and civilian sites, including military bases, government institutions, and civilian gatherings, as part of its efforts to consolidate its presence in central and southern Somalia. Recent media reports indicate a surge in Al-Shabaab's activities in towns and villages near Mogadishu, with the group increasingly targeting Somali military positions and patrolling the surrounding areas.

On 20 February, Al-Shabaab launched a coordinated offensive in the Middle Shabelle region, where the Somali federal government (FGS) has had the most success over the past three years. The group captured several villages but was driven out by Somali forces in the following days. Somali forces claimed to have killed 130 Al-Shabaab fighters during the operation. Some media reports suggested that Al-Shabaab captured military vehicles and weapons while also killing 93 people in the assault. On 27 February, Al-Shabaab launched another offensive in Balad, Middle Shabelle. Heavy fighting ensued as Al-Shabaab temporarily captured the town before Somali forces reclaimed it.

On 11 March, Al-Shabaab attacked a hotel in Beledweyne, central Somalia, targeting traditional elders and military officers involved in coordinating the government's offensive against the group. The

militants laid siege to the hotel for 24 hours, resulting in ten fatalities, including both civilians and military personnel.

On 18 March, the militant group targeted Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's motorcade with a bomb attack in Mogadishu. While the president escaped unharmed, the attack resulted in four deaths. It drew widespread condemnation from the international community, including from Secretary-General António Guterres. The next day (19 March), a mortar attack struck the heavily fortified Halane compound near Aden Adde International Airport in Mogadishu, which houses UN and AU officials and multiple foreign embassies.

On 20 March, two Al-Shabaab attacks were reported in the Lower Shabelle region. The militants launched an attack on Sabiid village, approximately 30 kilometres southwest of Mogadishu, and ambushed a reinforcement convoy travelling to Sabiid, killing a senior military official.

In response to the security threats, the Somali National Army has launched multiple retaliatory operations against Al-Shabaab, aiming to repel the militants, degrade their capabilities, and reclaim strategic territories. These operations have been supported by AUSSOM troops, local clan forces, and international security partners, with airstrikes and ground operations conducted across several districts in central and southern Somalia. Somali officials claim that these efforts have resulted in the deaths of over 400 Al-Shabaab militants as at mid-March.

International security partners have been instrumental in the Somali offensive against Al-Shabaab. The Ethiopian Air Force, in coordination with the Somali government, struck multiple Al-Shabaab positions in Middle Shabelle in March, while Ethiopian National Defense Forces were deployed near Ferfer for planned operations. Since US President Donald Trump assumed office in January, there has been a significant increase in US airstrikes targeting Al-Shabaab militants. Additionally, the US and the United Arab Emirates have carried out multiple airstrikes on IS-Somalia strongholds, supporting operations led by Puntland state forces.

In late February, the AU and Somalia reached an agreement on the troop allocation for AUSSOM. The Concept of Operations for AUSSOM outlines a total mission strength of up to 11,911 personnel. According to media reports, the agreement allocates 4,500 soldiers to

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOMALIA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2767 (27 December 2024) endorsed the decision of the AU Peace and Security Council to replace the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) with the AU Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), beginning 1 January. S/RES/2753 (30 October 2024) authorised the transition of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSAM) to the UN Country Team (UNCT) over a two-year period, starting on 1 November. S/RES/2719 (21 December 2023) was on the financing of African Union (AU)-led peace support operations (AUPSOs).

Somalia

Uganda, 2,500 to Ethiopia, 1,520 to Djibouti, 1,410 to Kenya, and 1,091 to Egypt. Additionally, several hundred police personnel from Egypt, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone are set to be deployed in Mogadishu, Jowhar, and Baidoa. (For background and more information, see the brief on Somalia in our February 2025 *Monthly Forecast*.)

On 4 March, a joint AU-UN delegation conducting the independent strategic review of the UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) concluded a visit to Mogadishu. During the visit, the delegation engaged with key stakeholders, including officials from the Somali federal government, troop- and police-contributing countries, AUSSOM, and UNSOS. The discussions focused on assessing and recommending ways to optimise the efficiency, performance, management, and structure of UNSOS while ensuring its continued effectiveness in supporting AUSSOM's mandate. At time of writing, the UNSOS review was expected to be circulated to Council members by 1 April.

Key Issues and Options

One of the key issues for the Council in April is the transition process of UNTMIS. In resolution 2753 of 30 October 2024, which authorised UNTMIS' mandate until 31 October 2025, the Council requested the Secretary-General to prepare, in consultation with the FGS, a roadmap for completing the first phase of the transition of UNTMIS's tasks to the FGS, the UN country team, and other stakeholders. The resolution asked the Secretary-General to incorporate the roadmap in his report, which was circulated to members on 28 March.

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

The persistent insecurity in Somalia remains a critical issue for Council members. Al-Shabaab continues to demonstrate its ability to conduct attacks, with the group's reach extending to Mogadishu. Despite efforts by Somali forces, which have carried out robust offensive operations across multiple fronts, Al-Shabaab remains a potent force posing serious security threats to Somalia and the region. Recent media reports attribute Al-Shabaab's resurgence to deepening societal divisions, particularly ongoing clan rivalries, and political disarray, including President Mohamud's strained relations with various factions and some federal member states. These fractures reportedly have weakened the government's defences, allowing Al-Shabaab to exploit internal divisions and expand its influence.

Another critical issue before Council members is the financing of AUSSOM. Resolution 2767 requested the Secretary-General to implement the framework established under resolution 2719 of 21 December 2023 regarding the financing of AU-led peace support

operations (AUPSOs) in a "hybrid" format starting 1 July. This implementation, however, is contingent on the Council confirming the request through a decision by 15 May. Ahead of this decision, the Council is expected to consider the independent strategic review of UNSOS and a report detailing the progress made in preparations for the implementation of the 2719 framework to AUSSOM under the "hybrid" model, to be submitted by the Secretary-General by 1 May.

(For background and more information, see our 26 December 2024 *What's in Blue* story.) There seems to be a strong push to delay the progress report on the application for the 2719 framework to AUSSOM, which is critical for upcoming discussions on the financing of the mission.

In light of the challenging Council dynamics regarding AUSSOM's financing, an international donor conference could be instrumental in mobilising additional funds for sustaining peace support operations in Somalia and consolidating security gains. One option for Council members would be to explore contingency plans in the face of strong opposition from the US regarding the use of the 2719 framework for Somalia. Without a clear financing mechanism, the mission could be jeopardised, leading to a security vacuum and the loss of hard-earned security gains.

Council Dynamics

Council members support the Somali federal government's priorities and recognise the many challenges the country faces, including the persistent insecurity caused by the terrorist activities of Al-Shabaab. They also support ongoing efforts to fight the group, including the implementation of sanctions to degrade Al-Shabaab.

Council members reached an agreement in December 2024 to establish AUSSOM, albeit with considerable difficulty. The critical issue of its long-term financing, however, remains unresolved, and divisions among Council members have deepened in this regard. On 11 February, US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman James Risch posted on X that resolution 2719 should not be used to finance AUSSOM, arguing that doing so "would lock the US into perpetual funding through its dues to the UN". He instead urged the European Union (EU) to work with US President Donald Trump to develop an alternative funding solution.

In contrast, Somalia—having joined the Council as an elected member for the 2025-26 term—along with all other Council members, except the US, supports financing AUSSOM through the framework established under resolution 2719. The EU, a key financial contributor to AU operations in Somalia, advocates for a sustainable financing model based on diversified contributions and cost-sharing. While the EU remains committed to supporting the AU's efforts in Somalia, it has increasingly focused on providing direct financial assistance to Somali security forces.

Western Sahara

Expected Council Action

In April, Security Council members are expected to receive a briefing in closed consultations on the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). The Special Representative for Western Sahara and Head of MINURSO, Alexander Ivanko, and the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General, Staffan de Mistura, are the anticipated briefers.

Key Recent Developments

The Secretary-General's latest report on MINURSO, published on 1 October 2024 and covering developments from the previous year, highlighted improvements in the mission's observation efforts, attributing these to better access to areas near the berm and more timely security assurances for its movement to sites of alleged firing incidents and aerial strikes. (The berm, an approximately 1,700-mile-long earthen wall, separates the Moroccan-administered part of Western Sahara from territory controlled by the Polisario Front—the entity representing the Sahrawi people of Western Sahara.) The report noted, however, that west of the berm (that is, the area controlled by Morocco), security and safety concerns sometimes hindered the mission's operational and observation activities in areas with frequent firing incidents. Moreover, the mission's lack of access to local interlocutors in this region continued to severely limit its ability to collect reliable situational awareness, assess developments, and provide comprehensive reporting across its area of responsibility.

The report highlighted significant progress in addressing logistical supply constraints on the east side of the berm. The mission's deployment in this area, however, remained subject to prior authorisation from Polisario on a "provisional and exceptional" basis. For the first time since 2020, MINURSO team site commanders held liaison meetings with the Polisario Front's deputy military regional commanders at their respective team sites. Nonetheless, the MINURSO force commander remained unable to establish direct contact with the Polisario Front's military leadership.

During Council members' 16 October 2024 closed consultations on MINURSO, de Mistura apparently introduced an idea for the partition of the territory of Western Sahara between Morocco and the Polisario Front. According to Reuters, this plan reportedly entailed creating "an independent state in the southern part, and integration of the rest of the territory as part of Morocco, with its sovereignty over it internationally recognized". De Mistura apparently asked that the Secretary-General assess the "usefulness" of the envoy position if no progress is achieved within the next six months.

Both parties subsequently rejected De Mistura's plan. In a 17 October 2024 press release, Secretary-General of the Polisario Front Brahim Ghali dismissed the proposal, stressing that any initiative must fully guarantee the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination. Morocco's Foreign Minister, Nasser Bourita, then rejected the proposal during a 21 October press conference, reaffirming Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara.

On 31 October 2024, the Security Council adopted resolution 2756, extending MINURSO's mandate for another year. The resolution passed with 12 votes in favour and two abstentions (Russia and then-Council member Mozambique), while Algeria did not

participate in the vote. It also introduced new language in the preambular paragraphs, welcoming recent momentum and urging further progress. (For background, see our 31 October 2024 *What's in Blue* story.)

The situation on the ground remains tense, characterised by ongoing low-intensity hostilities between Morocco and the Polisario Front. On 9 November 2024, the Polisario Front reportedly launched four missiles at Mahbes, a Moroccan-controlled town in Western Sahara near the Algerian border. The missiles landed near a civilian gathering, though no casualties were reported. In retaliation, the Moroccan army conducted drone strikes targeting Polisario positions, which apparently resulted in casualties, including the death of a senior commander. On 26 November 2024, Moroccan First Lieutenant General Mohamed Berriz met with MINURSO force commander Lieutenant General Fakhru Ahsan in Agadir to address the security situation.

In January, Morocco reportedly carried out two drone strikes in Polisario-controlled territory. The first strike, conducted near Bir Lahlou on 11 January, resulted in the deaths of four individuals, while a second strike on 18 January in Al Haouza killed three senior Polisario officers.

Key Issues and Options

The underlying issue for the Council is how to facilitate a viable and lasting resolution to the long-standing deadlock over the status of Western Sahara. The lack of progress perpetuates instability, leaving MINURSO with limited ability to fulfil its mandate and increasing the risk of further hostilities in the region. Meanwhile, Council members have to navigate the competing interests of key stakeholders in the conflict.

Significant obstacles remain in the peace process. The November 2020 decision by the Polisario Front to abandon the 1991 ceasefire has led to a rise in hostilities over the last few years. At the same time, Morocco controls more than three-quarters of Western Sahara and has made substantial investments in the region, including a \$1.2 billion port project in Dakhla. Moroccan settlers account for nearly two-thirds of the approximately half-million residents of Western Sahara. Regional tensions have also complicated the process. Since Algeria severed diplomatic ties with Morocco in October 2021, there has been no significant progress in restoring relations.

The operational challenges faced by the mission, including restrictions on movement, limited access to key areas, and difficulties in engaging with local interlocutors, are also an issue.

The human rights situation in Western Sahara also remains a matter of concern for Council members. Despite multiple requests from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and strong encouragement from the Security Council in its MINURSO resolutions, access to Western Sahara has not been granted since 2015. According to the Secretary-General's 1 October 2024 report, OHCHR was unable to conduct any visits to Western Sahara for the ninth consecutive year. The report added that OHCHR continued to receive reports of hindrance, intimidation, and harassment against Sahrawi activists advocating for the right to self-determination, all indications of a shrinking civic space.

Council members could consider holding an informal interactive

Western Sahara

dialogue (IID) with the various stakeholders of the process, the leadership of MINURSO, Personal Envoy de Mistura, and interested regional and subregional member states and organisations. (The IID is a closed format that, unlike closed consultations, allows for the participation of non-UN officials and briefers.)

Another option could be to issue press elements following consultations scheduled in April to express support for de Mistura's efforts and urge the relevant parties to resume negotiations, show flexibility in their engagement with the Personal Envoy and each other, and expand on their positions, in the hopes of ending the current impasse and achieving progress towards a political solution.

Council Dynamics

Council members hold divergent positions on Western Sahara. The US, the penholder on Western Sahara, recognised Morocco's sovereignty over the region in December 2020 during the first administration of US President Donald Trump and committed to opening a consulate in the disputed territory, which has not come to fruition yet. The UK supports a "just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution, based on compromise, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara".

France recently fully endorsed Morocco's autonomy plan as the "only basis" for a political solution and deepened financial ties with Rabat, pledging over 10 billion euros in investments during Macron's October 2024 visit. Another major point of friction in Paris-Algiers relations has been France's efforts to deport Algerian nationals. However, recent weeks have seen efforts to mend ties.

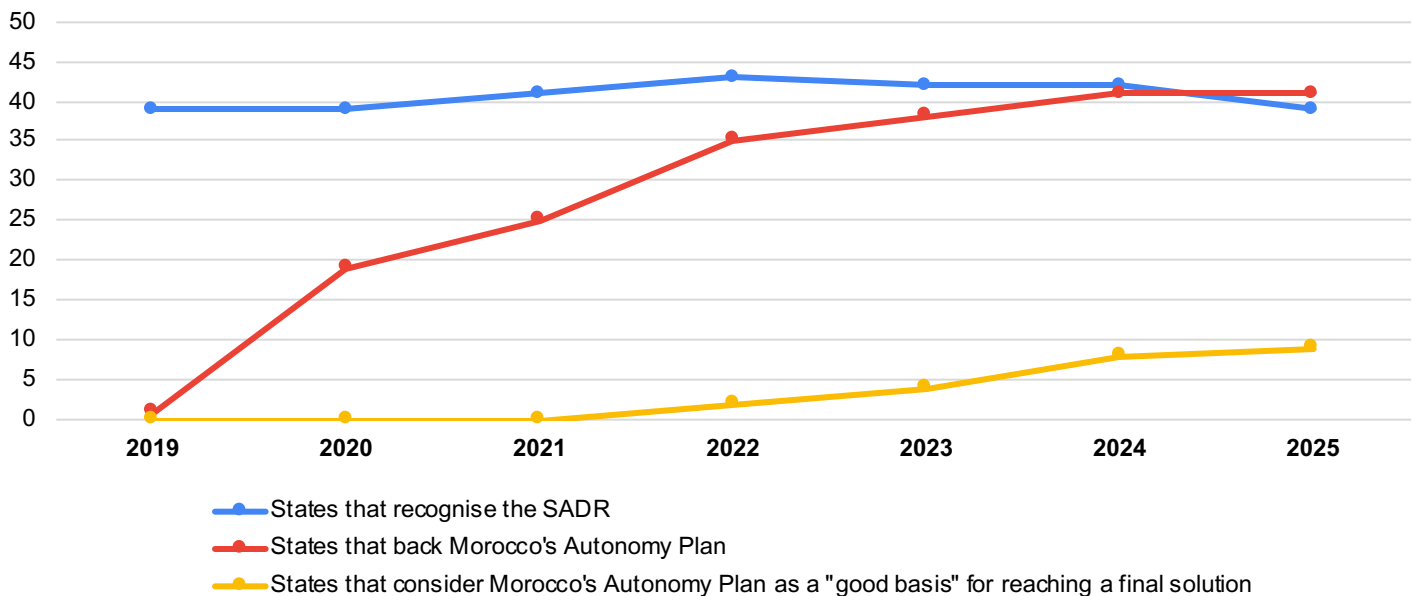
Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, in a recent interview, described Macron as the "only point of reference" for restoring relations with France, signalling a willingness to engage in dialogue after a prolonged diplomatic rift.

The Council do not have a common position. Sierra Leone recognises Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara and established a consulate in Dakhla in August 2021. Algeria strongly supports the Sahrawis' right to self-determination and maintains diplomatic relations with the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). Guyana, which is a member of the "A3 plus one" grouping, withdrew its recognition of the SADR, dating from 1979, in November 2020.

Among the newly elected Council members, Denmark views Morocco's Autonomy Plan as "a good basis for an agreed solution between all parties," while Greece considers it a "serious and credible" approach. Pakistan and Somalia maintain cordial relations with both Algeria and Morocco but neither country recognises the SADR nor endorses Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara. Meanwhile, in November 2024, Panama suspended diplomatic relations with SADR.

Difficult Council dynamics were apparent during the negotiations on resolution 2756. Algeria argued that its views were neither considered nor given due weight but rather "deliberately ignored" by the penholder (the US). Ahead of the vote on the draft resolution, authored by the US, Algeria tabled two draft amendments to the text, but they did not garner the requisite number of votes to be adopted. The US, meanwhile, reaffirmed its support for Morocco's autonomy plan, describing it as "serious, credible, and realistic" and as a potential approach to meet the aspirations of the people of Western Sahara.

Trends in States' Positions on the Western Sahara Issue



Yemen

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council will hold its monthly meeting on Yemen.

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

Key Recent Developments

The Yemeni Houthi rebel group (also known as Ansar Allah) continued its escalatory rhetoric and attacks against Israel in solidarity with the Palestinian people. Since the onset of the war in Gaza in November 2023, the Houthis have launched over 100 attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, as well as multiple missile and drone attacks towards Israeli territory, most of which have been intercepted. The Houthis are part of a coalition dubbed the “Axis of Resistance”, which is supported by Iran and includes Hamas and Hezbollah.

The US has increased its rhetoric against the Houthis, warning that it would take action against the Houthis if they resumed their attacks in the Red Sea and on Israel, including in its statement in the 6 March Council meeting on Yemen. On 4 March, the US State Department, acting under an executive order signed by President Donald Trump shortly after taking office on 20 January, designated the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO). In spite of this, the Houthis announced on 7 March that they would restart their naval operations against Israel if Israel continued to block aid shipments into Gaza.

On 15 and 16 March, the US launched multiple large-scale airstrikes on Houthi targets in Yemen—including in the capital, Sanaa, and the Houthi-controlled province of Sa’ada—marking the first significant escalation in Yemen since the Israel-Hamas ceasefire agreement took effect on 19 January. According to the Houthi health ministry spokesperson, 53 people were killed in the strikes, including five children and two women, and 98 people were wounded. US National Security Adviser Mike Waltz said that the attacks targeted and killed “multiple Houthi leaders” as part of a strategic aim to go after the group’s leadership. The Houthis, however, reportedly pledged that they would respond to the “escalation with further escalation” and that its militants would also target US ships in the Red Sea.

In response to these developments, the Office for the Spokesperson of the UN Secretary-General expressed concern on 17 March about the continued threats by the Houthis and the US strikes on Houthi-controlled areas. The UN called for restraint and warned that additional escalations could exacerbate regional tensions and “further destabilise Yemen and the region and pose grave risks to the already dire humanitarian situation in the country”.

Since Israel’s resumption of large-scale military operations in Gaza on 18 March (for more information, see our 20 March *What’s in Blue* story), the Houthis have reportedly launched at least seven ballistic missile attacks on Israel, all of which have been successfully intercepted. Reportedly, the US has continued to conduct intense airstrikes on Houthi targets, including in the capital Sanaa and the port city of Hodeidah, while Trump has also warned that the Houthis would be “completely annihilated”.

A key part of the US approach to the Houthis also involves holding Iran directly responsible for the support it provides to the group as part of a wider strategy of maximising pressure on Tehran. In

a Truth Social platform post, Trump said that any attack by the Houthis will be deemed an attack from Iran and that the US will hold it responsible. In response, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei reportedly warned of “a severe blow” if the US or any other nation acts against Iran and dismissed accusations that the Houthis are Iranian proxies. The inflammatory exchange of rhetoric also comes at a time when the US is pressuring Tehran over its nuclear program.

The security situation within Yemen is of growing concern. The UN-mediated truce of April 2022 remains largely in effect. In his remarks at the 6 March Council meeting on Yemen, however, UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg warned that “a return to full conflict is palpable” as military activity continues to drive instability. He referred to concerning “recent reports of shelling, drone attacks, infiltration attempts and mobilization campaigns” on multiple fronts and reiterated his calls for the parties to “refrain from military posturing and retaliatory measures that could risk plunging Yemen back into widespread conflict”. Media reports suggest the Houthis have increased mobilisation and attacks in certain areas, such as Marib—a province controlled by the Yemeni government with oil and gas resources that could gain increased importance if the FTO designation results in resource shortages for the Houthis.

On the political front, the intra-Yemeni political and peace processes remain at a standstill. During the Council’s last meeting on Yemen, Grundberg stressed that for a comprehensive settlement of the conflict in Yemen, the environment must be conducive to peace; his briefing occurred a few days before the most recent exchange of escalatory rhetoric and strikes. He added that, notwithstanding the potential ramifications of the FTO designation, efforts to advance a peaceful settlement in Yemen remain critical, and the elements of Yemen’s roadmap for peace continue to represent a viable path towards a principled and impartial resolution of the conflict. To settle the conflict in Yemen, Grundberg identified three challenges that must be addressed by the conflict parties: a nationwide ceasefire and a mechanism to implement it; agreement on difficult concessions and compromises, particularly on the economic situation; and lastly, an inclusive political process.

The Houthis also continue to hold UN, non-governmental organisation (NGO), civil society, and diplomatic mission personnel in detention, further undermining efforts to advance the Yemeni peace process. Since May 2024, the Houthis have detained more than 50 such personnel. The 10 February UN pause on operations and programmes in the Sa’ada governorate continues because of an erosion in the necessary security conditions and guarantees required to operate, impacting the UN’s ability to deliver aid to those in need. In a 13 February press statement, Security Council members demanded that the Houthis immediately and unconditionally release all those detained and ensure safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to areas under their control.

Women, Peace and Security

In his briefing at the 6 March Security Council meeting on Yemen, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Tom Fletcher expressed concern about the severe consequences of funding cuts on humanitarian aid in the country, focusing in particular on the negative impact on the situation of women and girls. He said that 9.6 million

Yemen

women and girls in Yemen are “in severe need of life-saving humanitarian assistance”, 1.3 million pregnant women and new mothers are malnourished, 1.5 million girls are out of school, and approximately one-third of all girls in Yemen are married before the age of 18. Fletcher warned that these statistics will become worse as funding for Yemen “evaporates”. He stressed that funding suspensions have already led to the closure of 22 safe spaces, “denying services and support to over 11,000 women and girls in high-risk areas”. Fletcher noted that despite “bearing the greatest burdens” of the war in Yemen, women remain on the frontlines of survival and recovery, and he called on the international community to ensure humanitarians have the funding to “save as many lives” as possible.

Key Issues and Options

Yemen is facing immense challenges on the political, security, and economic fronts. Renewed hostilities—including the ramped-up US campaign against the Houthis, Houthi threats in the Red Sea, and their attacks on Israel—contribute to a continued lack of progress towards an intra-Yemeni political resolution and degradation of the country’s security and humanitarian environment as well as pushing the overall prospects for peace further off course.

Preventing a severe escalation of hostilities in Yemen and the Red Sea and relaunching the stalled intra-Yemeni political process will remain priorities for the Security Council. Should the situation continue to escalate, Council members may seek ways to add pressure for an urgent resumption of dialogue between the Houthis and the Yemeni government towards a nationwide ceasefire and a political settlement.

One option for the Council would be to issue a presidential statement stressing that there is no military solution to the conflict in Yemen and demanding that the Yemeni parties resume concrete discussions on establishing a roadmap under UN auspices for inclusive peace in the country. The statement could also reiterate provisions from Council resolution 2768, emphasising the need to address the root causes of the attacks in the Red Sea and calling on all member states to adhere to the arms embargo imposed by the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee. (Adopted on 15 January 2025, resolution 2768 extended the Secretary-General’s monthly reporting requirement on Houthi attacks on vessels in the Red Sea.)

A related issue is the impact of the continued threat of attacks by the Houthis in the Red Sea on 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 to the delivery of humanitarian aid and by urging member states to mobilise funding to meet the requirements of the Yemen Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2025, including through a potential pledging conference.

Council Dynamics

Council members are largely aligned in support of an inclusive intra-Yemeni political process, the need to improve humanitarian conditions in the country, and an immediate end to Houthi attacks in the Red Sea. Advancing mediation efforts towards a resumption of dialogue and a peace process under UN auspices remains a priority for members.

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

Illustrating President Trump’s policy of increasing pressure on the Houthis, the US stressed during the 6 March Council meeting that it is taking concrete steps to eliminate the Houthis’ capabilities and to exert maximum pressure on Iran to end the support it provides to the armed group. The US further stressed that the Council must respond to Iran’s flagrant violations of Council resolutions through its continued arming of the Houthis.

Furthermore, Council members may have increasing concerns regarding the impact of funding cuts on the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, which has become more dire as a result of the recent US Agency for International Development (USAID) aid 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.

South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council will hold a briefing, followed by consultations, on the situation in South Sudan. Special Representative and Head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Nicholas Haysom will brief on the Secretary-General’s 90-day report on South Sudan and developments in the country.

The Council is also expected to renew UNMISS’ mandate before its expiration on 30 April.

Key Recent Developments

In mid-February, clashes erupted in Nasir County in Upper Nile state between the South Sudan People’s Defence Forces (SSPDF)—the government’s forces—and local armed youth from the Nuer community, known as the White Army, which is linked to Riek Machar, South Sudan’s First Vice-President and the leader of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO). Tensions reportedly escalated after the government deployed additional forces to Nasir, including fighters from the Agwelek and Abushok militias. While the SSPDF described the deployment as a

South Sudan

routine troop rotation, Machar argued that it violated the ceasefire and transitional security arrangements established by the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), leading to increased tensions and insecurity.

The situation worsened when fighting resumed in early March after the White Army seized control of an SSPDF base in Nasir on 4 March. On 7 March, a UN helicopter conducting an evacuation mission of SSPDF personnel came under fire, resulting in the death of one UN crew member and serious injuries to two others. According to UNMISS, the operation was carried out at the request of all parties involved, with assurances of safe passage for those trapped. Nevertheless, 28 SSPDF soldiers, including a general, were reportedly killed during UNMISS' attempt to extract them.

In the wake of these violent clashes, the South Sudanese government reportedly detained several political and military figures aligned with Machar, including General Gabriel Duop Lam, the SPLM-IO's acting chief of staff. Media reports also noted that government security forces had surrounded Machar's residence.

On 11 March, Uganda's military chief, General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, confirmed that the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) had deployed to Juba, South Sudan's capital, following a request from the South Sudanese government. Subsequently, the SPLM-IO announced on 18 March the immediate suspension of its participation in key security and political mechanisms established under the R-ARCSS, citing the detention of its officials, escalating violence, and the presence of Ugandan troops in the country. On 23 March, Machar sent a letter to several senior UN officials, including Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix, warning that issues with the R-ARCSS, particularly the presence of Ugandan forces in the country, could lead to the collapse of the agreement. He called on the UN Security Council, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AUPSC), and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to intervene and urged the Ugandan government to withdraw its military forces from the country.

At the time of writing, the security situation in Nasir County remains precarious despite several calls from the international community to de-escalate tensions. In March, the South Sudanese army, reportedly supported by the UPDF, conducted at least two aerial strikes in the area, resulting in the deaths of several civilians and significant damage to residential areas.

On 18 March, Security Council members convened in closed consultations to discuss the recent outbreak of violence in South Sudan and its implications for UNMISS. Another issue raised during the consultations concerned the South Sudanese government's request for UNMISS to vacate its Tomping base, located adjacent to the Juba International Airport, citing national security and development priorities. UNMISS has argued that the base remains essential for its operations, serving as an assembly area and evacuation staging site for UN personnel, humanitarian partners, and, upon request, diplomatic staff from various embassies in Juba. (For more information, see our 18 March *What's in Blue* story.)

On 19 March, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir Mayardit appointed General James Koang Chuol as the governor of Upper

Nile state. The SPLM-IO condemned this decision, arguing that the appointment was made without prior consultation and violated the agreement's power-sharing provisions, which allocate certain positions to the SPLM-IO. Similar unilateral appointments in recent months, in which Kiir replaced opposition officials with his loyalists, have reportedly heightened tensions.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 28 February, the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan presented its report to the UN Human Rights Council. Based on the Commission's independent investigations conducted throughout 2024, along with engagements with South Sudanese authorities and open-source forensic analysis, the report highlights the role of the country's political and military elites in perpetuating instability and extreme violence against civilians.

In a press release, Commission Chair Yasmin Sooka stated, "[s]exual violence persists both in and outside conflicts, while senior officials continue to endorse extrajudicial killings, and the forced recruitment and abduction of boys and girls into combat or sexual slavery remain unchecked." Commissioner Barney Afako added that the Commission's investigations revealed that the repetition of human rights violations is inextricably tied to "pervasive impunity, the lack of accountability in governance, and the failure to properly direct the country's national wealth toward establishing credible institutions and systems".

The Commission highlighted the urgent need to recommit to the institution-building objectives outlined in the R-ARCSS.

In a 3 March press release, the Commission warned that escalating violence in the Upper Nile state, rising tensions in Juba, and ongoing political manoeuvres pose serious threats to the R-ARCSS. It emphasised that the current trajectory of instability, repression, and renewed conflict must not persist and urged all parties to the agreement, along with other South Sudanese stakeholders, to uphold their human rights obligations and commit to completing the transitional process.

Key Issues and Options

The main issue for the Council is how to prevent South Sudan from descending into civil war while addressing the structural issues that contribute to recurring violence and political instability. Although the revitalised agreement has so far prevented large-scale clashes, local violence persists, with recent unrest heightening fears of a return to a full-scale conflict.

A related issue is how UNMISS and the broader international community can continue supporting the transition amid increasing political fragmentation. Persistent delays in the political transition and deep mistrust among political leaders have hampered progress. Despite repeated extensions of the transitional period, the parties have failed to demonstrate the political will to implement critical benchmarks outlined in the R-ARCSS necessary for holding national elections, such as deployment of unified forces, civic education, election security, and voter registration. Furthermore, the lack of financial resources and delays in legal and political decisions continue to stall key processes.

The renewal of the UNMISS mandate is a key priority in April. Council members are likely to consider how to adapt the mission's role in light of the country's deteriorating political and security environment, particularly regarding technical assistance provided in support of the implementation of the revitalised agreement and the peace process. The upcoming closed consultations with Haysom, scheduled ahead of the mandate renewal, will provide an opportunity for Council members to engage in a frank exchange about the

South Sudan

necessary adjustments to UNMISS' mandate in response to evolving conditions on the ground.

The obstacles to UNMISS's ability to fulfil its mandate and responsibilities, including restrictions on freedom of movement and violations of the status of forces agreement, continue to be an issue. Attacks against peacekeepers and civilian personnel remain a significant concern for Council members.

One option for Council members would be to request the Secretary-General to conduct an independent strategic review of UNMISS to assess the challenges to peace and security in South Sudan and provide detailed recommendations for the possible reconfiguration of the UNMISS mandate and its civilian, police and military components to account for developments in the peace process.

In April, the Council could also consider inviting a civil society representative to brief on the challenges facing South Sudan, including the implementation of the revitalised agreement.

The broader regional context also poses a serious challenge, particularly the spillover effects of the ongoing conflict in Sudan. Recent media reports indicate that fighters from the Rapid Support Forces, a Sudanese paramilitary, have retreated into South Sudan following territorial losses to the Sudanese Armed Forces. A recent clash between RSF fighters and SPLM-IO forces in Upper Nile state, which resulted in the deaths of senior SPLM-IO officials, has heightened concerns over potential cross-border alliances that could further destabilise the region. (For more information, see our 18 March *What's in Blue* story.)

Members may consider convening an informal briefing with regional countries to discuss the conflict's impact on the region.

Council and Wider Dynamics

On 21 March, Council members demonstrated unity in strongly condemning the attacks against UNMISS personnel and calling for those responsible to be held accountable. They called on the parties to the 2018 revitalised agreement to refrain from further violence, engage in national dialogue to restore and maintain peace, and to immediately de-escalate tensions. During the Council's 18 March meeting, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations (DPPA-DPO) Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee and some Council members apparently voiced concerns over the presence of Ugandan forces in the country, highlighting that their involvement could heighten tensions and exacerbate the security situation.

Council members share similar concerns about the delays in

implementing the R-ARCSS, the ongoing sub-national and inter-communal violence, and the economic and humanitarian crises in South Sudan. Members, however, have diverging views about the context of the situation and the extent to which the Council can and should apply pressure on the parties to fully implement the peace agreement. Some members, such as the US, have been more critical than others about what they perceive as the South Sudanese government's lack of political will to implement the R-ARCSS.

Other Council members—such as China, Russia, and the members of the “A3 plus one” grouping (Algeria, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Guyana)—are less critical of the government. In their statements, these members often highlight the progress made by the South Sudanese government amidst the challenges facing South Sudan, including the dire humanitarian situation, intercommunal violence, and the economic crisis. Some of these members, such as China and Russia, have argued that sanctions imposed on the South Sudanese government have hindered its ability to build and consolidate its security institutions and should be lifted or adjusted to support the country's peace efforts.

Regarding South Sudan's request for UNMISS to vacate the Tomping base, during the 18 March meeting, some members, such as Algeria and Somalia, highlighted the need to respect the host country's sovereignty, recognise its legitimate needs, and address them appropriately. Meanwhile, several other Council members reiterated concerns raised by the mission, particularly regarding security risks, safety implications, and the high costs associated with relocation. Following the 18 March Council meeting, several members sent a demarche to the South Sudanese mission in New York, expressing concerns that the proposed changes could disrupt UNMISS operations and incur significant costs while urging constructive engagement.

In response to the recent surge in violence, both regional and international stakeholders have expressed deep concern over the escalating security situation, urging de-escalation, restraint, and constructive dialogue. Regional bodies—the AUPSC and IGAD—quickly convened and responded to the evolving political and security situation. IGAD decided to establish a ministerial-level sub-committee on South Sudan that would travel to Juba to conduct an assessment “on modalities of initiating an inclusive dialogue” on the status of the R-ARCSS and the Kenyan-led Tumaini initiative. However, in late March, the South Sudanese government abruptly postponed the visit of IGAD ministers without providing an explanation.

The US is the penholder on South Sudan.

Great Lakes Region (DRC)

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

Since the Council's last meeting on the Great Lakes region on 8 October 2024, the security situation in eastern DRC has deteriorated significantly. The rebel group Mouvement du 23 Mars (M23) has more than doubled its control of territory in North Kivu and South Kivu provinces, capturing strategic cities such as Goma and Bukavu, the capitals of these two provinces, respectively. On 19 March, the M23 captured Walikale, a mining town along a major highway leading to Kisangani, the provincial capital of Tshopo province. However, on 22 March, the group announced its decision to "reposition" its forces from the town and surrounding areas to foster conditions favourable for dialogue.

On 18 March, DRC President Felix Tshisekedi and Rwandan President Paul Kagame met in Doha under the facilitation of the Emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. According to a joint statement released after their meeting, the two leaders "reaffirmed the commitment of all parties to an immediate and unconditional ceasefire" as decided by a joint summit of the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on 8 February. (For more, see our 19 February *What's in Blue* story.)

The DRC and M23 had apparently agreed to send delegations to Luanda for direct talks also on 18 March under the auspices of Angolan President João Lourenço. Announced following Tshisekedi's meeting with Lourenço in Luanda on 11 March, the talks would have marked an encouraging step forward, as the DRC had not engaged directly with M23, preferring instead to talk to Rwanda, which has been accused of supporting the M23. However, the M23 reportedly pulled out of the talks following a 17 March decision by the European Council to impose restrictive measures on nine individuals and one entity, including M23 President Bertrand Bisimwa, who was supposed to lead the group's delegation to Luanda.

Angola appears not to have been aware of the Doha initiative. Nonetheless, its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tete António, has reportedly said that his country would continue its efforts to convene direct talks between the DRC and M23 at an opportune moment. On 24 March, Lourenço announced his intention to step down from his mediation role in order to focus on his new responsibilities as the current Chair of the African Union (AU).

At the 8 February EAC/SADC summit, leaders decided to merge the Nairobi and Luanda processes aimed at facilitating dialogue between the DRC and armed groups operating in eastern DRC, including the M23, and easing tensions between the DRC and Rwanda. Technical experts and Chiefs of Defence from the EAC and SADC met in Dar es Salaam on 23 and 24 February, respectively, to discuss the implementation of the joint EAC/SADC summit

decisions: securing an immediate ceasefire and cessation of hostilities, providing humanitarian assistance (including the repatriation of the deceased and evacuation of the injured), developing a "securitisation plan" for Goma and its surrounding areas, and opening airports and key supply routes. The technical experts had apparently assessed that the SADC Mission in the DRC's (SAMIDRC) situation had become untenable, given the significant challenges it faced in implementing its mandate and floated the idea of deploying a hybrid force composed of the EAC, SADC, and the AU. However, the Congolese delegation rejected the proposal, and it was eventually dropped.

On 17 March, the EAC and SADC Council of Ministers met in Harare, Zimbabwe, to discuss the report of the technical experts and chiefs of defence meetings. The ministers, among other things, called on the UN to enhance the capacity of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) to support the implementation of a "securitisation plan" for North Kivu and South Kivu provinces. They also underscored the need to develop a political framework to expedite the establishment of the merged process by the end of March. The outcome of their meeting was discussed at a second EAC and SADC joint summit held virtually on 24 March. The summit appointed five co-facilitators for the merged process considering gender, regional and language balance: former presidents Olusegun Obasanjo (Nigeria), Uhuru Kenyatta (Kenya), Kgalema Motlanthe (South Africa), Catherine Samba-Panza (the Central African Republic), and Sahle-Work Zewde (Ethiopia).

On 6 March, the SADC Organ Troika Plus—comprising the current, incoming, and outgoing chairs of the SADC Organ (Tanzania, Malawi, and Zambia)—held a virtual extraordinary summit with the participation of troop-contributing countries (TCCs) of SAMIDRC deployed since December 2023. These TCCs (South Africa, Malawi, and Tanzania) and the DRC discussed the situation in eastern DRC and reviewed SAMIDRC's mandate. Several SAMIDRC soldiers were killed and others wounded during the M23's offensive in North Kivu. At the meeting, the leaders recommended the withdrawal of SAMIDRC soldiers and equipment from eastern DRC. Subsequently, a SADC extraordinary summit, held virtually on 13 March, accepted the recommendations of the SADC Organ Troika Plus and decided to terminate SAMIDRC's mandate, directing the troops to commence a phased withdrawal from the DRC.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 3 March press release, OHCHR voiced alarm for the wellbeing of at least 130 sick and wounded men following their abduction by the M23 rebels from CBCA Ndosho and Heal Africa Hospitals in Goma on the night of 28 February. In response to the attacks, they called for their immediate release and return and stressed that the group must take prompt, concrete steps to ensure an end to such arbitrary and abusive raids.

In a 5 March press release, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders Mary Lawlor expressed concern over the safety of human rights defenders in the eastern DRC. Amidst the ongoing entrenchment of M23 in the region since their offensive began earlier this year, those who have documented and denounced their violations are under greater risks of reprisals from both the government and armed groups, with many having been directly targeted. As Lawlor remarked, she had received credible reports of human rights defenders being detained incommunicado, forcibly disappeared and tortured in Rutshuru and Masisi in North Kivu. Emphasising the need for urgent, practical support for human rights defenders in the region, Lawlor called upon the international community to "recognise their collective

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE GREAT LAKES Security Council Resolution S/RES/2746 (6 August 2024) authorised MONUSCO to provide operational and logistical support for SAMIDRC. Secretary-General's Report S/2024/700 (30 September 2024) was on the implementation of the PSC-F. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9742 (8 October 2024) was a briefing on the situation in the Great Lakes region.

Great Lakes Region (DRC)

responsibility towards the human rights defenders and urged Member States to seek them out and explore all avenues for rapid assistance to prevent the situation from further deteriorating”.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for Council members in April is how to stop the fighting in eastern DRC, which continues to be a source of tension among countries of the Great Lakes region. They may choose to issue a press statement welcoming the Doha joint statement, urging the implementation of commitments by all parties for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire.

The other major issue for Council members is how to ensure coordination among the various regional initiatives in the Great Lakes region. The quadripartite process initiated by the AU at a summit in June 2023 involving the EAC, the Economic Community of Central African States, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and SADC is of particular interest to members. In its 28 January communiqué, the AU Peace and Security Council directed the AU Commission to urgently convene a follow-up quadripartite meeting.

The revitalisation of the 2013 PSC-F to address the root causes of instability in the DRC and the Great Lakes region has been an ongoing issue. In light of the security situation in eastern DRC and its implications for regional peace and security, Council members may call for the urgent convening of the 12th meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the PSC-F, which is expected to be hosted by Uganda, but no date has been set.

Another issue is the implementation of resolution 2746, which authorised MONUSCO to provide logistical and operational support to SAMIDRC. During the meeting, Council members may note SADC’s decision to withdraw SAMIDRC and call on MONUSCO to continue supporting the mission during its phased withdrawal.

Council and Broader Dynamics

The unanimous adoption of resolution 2773 on 21 February—which condemned the ongoing offensive by the M23 in North Kivu and South Kivu provinces and called on the group to immediately cease hostilities, withdraw from areas it controls, and fully reverse the establishment of illegitimate parallel administrations—was considered a major development. However, its implementation faces serious challenges as the M23 offensive continues to advance.

International pressure seems to be steadily increasing on the M23 and Rwanda. On 20 February, the US imposed sanctions on James Kabarebe, Rwanda’s Minister of State for Regional Integration; Lawrence Kanyuka Kingston, an M23 spokesperson; and two of Kanyuka’s companies registered in France and the UK. The UK, Canada, and Germany also announced a range of measures on 25 February, 3 March, and 4 March, respectively, which include restricting or suspending bilateral financial aid and development cooperation with Rwanda. Kigali has criticised these decisions, arguing that such measures will not help solve the situation in eastern DRC.

The DRC has reportedly offered the US a “minerals deal” to help secure critical minerals in exchange for US support in its fight against the M23. Tshisekedi appeared on US news channel Fox News on 19 March to explain this offer, which he argued “will give strategic advantage to both countries”. US President Donald Trump has appointed Massad Boulos, a businessman who is the father-in-law of Trump’s daughter Tiffany, as his Special Envoy for the Great Lakes.

Libya

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council will hold its bimonthly briefing on the situation in Libya. Special Representative and Head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Hanna Tetteh will brief the Council on recent political, security, and humanitarian developments in the country and the Secretary-General’s latest report on UNSMIL.

Additionally, the chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee might brief on the Committee’s activities. (At the time of writing, the chair had not yet been appointed, as Council members continue to negotiate this year’s allocation of subsidiary bodies).

Key Recent Developments

The political impasse in Libya continues between the UN-recognised Government of National Unity (GNU), based in Tripoli and led by Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah with advisory support from the High State Council (HSC), and the eastern-based Government of National Stability (GNS), led by Prime Minister

Osama Hamad and backed by the House of Representatives (HoR) and the self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) under the command of General Khalifa Haftar. The parties remain deadlocked over proposed legislation to hold national elections that would reconcile the country’s divided government. A key point of contention concerns the formation of a unified interim government to organise the elections, a move favoured by the GNS and HoR but opposed by the GNU and some segments of the HSC. The prolonged stalemate between the rival governments—which has persisted since the indefinite postponement of the 2021 elections—is one of the root causes of Libya’s political, security, and economic instability.

On 4 February, UNSMIL announced the establishment of the Advisory Committee to address outstanding issues hindering the holding of elections in Libya. The Committee is composed of a diverse group of Libyan personalities, whose selection was based on several criteria, including expertise in legal, constitutional, and electoral issues; the ability to build compromise; and an understanding

UN DOCUMENTS ON LIBYA Security Council Resolution S/RES/2769 (16 January 2025) renewed the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee until 15 May 2026 and the authorisation of measures related to the illicit export of petroleum from Libya until 1 May 2026. **Secretary-General’s Report S/2024/895** (10 December 2024) was the 120-day report on UNSMIL. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9862** (19 February 2025) was a briefing on the situation in Libya.

Libya

of the political challenges facing Libya.

UNSMIL has clarified that the Committee's role is advisory, rather than decision-making, and its mandate is time-bound. The Committee is expected to provide proposals to UNSMIL for consideration in the next phase of the political process, while UNSMIL will facilitate communication between the Committee and relevant institutions.

At the time of writing, the Committee had held five meetings, including a meeting with the members of the joint 6+6 Committee. This Committee was established by the HoR and the GNU-aligned High State Council (HSC) to draft electoral laws to enable elections, comprising six representatives from each body.

Newly appointed Special Representative Hanna Tetteh officially began her duties on 20 February. In a statement issued the same day, she committed to lead UN mediation efforts in line with resolution 2755 of 31 October 2024, which last renewed UNSMIL's mandate. Emphasising the importance of Libyan-led and Libyan-owned solutions, Tetteh said that UNSMIL will engage with diverse Libyan communities and work with regional and international actors to support national unity and stability. She also affirmed UNSMIL's commitment to enabling inclusive elections and fostering a shared vision for Libya's future.

During the Council's most recent briefing on the situation in Libya, held on 19 February, Council members were unanimous in welcoming the appointment of Tetteh, while many members expressed their support for the establishment of the Advisory Committee. In her briefing, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo highlighted the stalled political process, economic issues, human rights violations, and security threats. DiCarlo emphasised the urgent need for progress and noted that UNSMIL is taking steps to revive the political process based on inclusivity and national ownership.

On 18 January, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for Osama Elmasry Njeem, suspected of crimes against humanity and war crimes in Libya from February 2015 onward. Njeem allegedly oversaw Tripoli prison facilities, where thousands were murdered, tortured, raped, and subjected to sexual violence. On 19 January, Italian authorities arrested Njeem in Turin, Italy. However, on 21 January, the Rome Court of Appeal (that is, an Italian appellate court) ordered his release due to a procedural error. That same day, Italy returned Njeem to Libya, citing security concerns. The ICC claims Italian authorities failed to notify them of any warrant issues. As a result of the incident, Italian prosecutors have launched an investigation into Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and two ministers concerning the repatriation of Njeem to Libya despite the ICC warrant for his arrest.

Libya is not a state party to the Rome Statute of the ICC. The Security Council referred the situation in Libya to the ICC through the unanimous adoption of resolution 1970 on 26 February 2011, which invited the ICC Prosecutor to update the Council every six

months. The ICC has jurisdiction over crimes listed in the Rome Statute committed on Libya's territory or by its nationals from 15 February 2011 onwards.

Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Council remains supporting political progress towards national elections to unify Libya's divided government. One of the core objectives for the Council is to help foster common political ground between the country's rival governments to reach an inclusive agreement on electoral laws, including the possible establishment of a unified interim government to organise the elections.

April's briefing will provide Council members with an opportunity to learn about preparations for and the implementation of UNSMIL's revitalised efforts to facilitate dialogue between Libyan political stakeholders. In this regard, Council members will likely be interested to hear more about the work of the Advisory Committee from Tetteh.

To demonstrate the Council's continued support for the mission's intensified engagement under Tetteh's leadership, members could consider issuing a press statement expressing support for the Special Representative and the efforts of the Advisory Committee. They could also consider holding a closed Arria-formula meeting with representatives of the rival governments for a frank discussion on potential ways to break the long-standing political impasse.

Council Dynamics

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

At the most recent briefing in Libya in February, many Council members welcomed the establishment of the Advisory Committee. Russia appeared more sceptical, however. It referred to the Committee as an ambiguous proposal created without consulting Council members. Russia expressed concerns about its inclusiveness and impartiality, emphasising that its work should be coordinated with key Libyan stakeholders.

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

The UK is the penholder on Libya.

Haiti

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council will hold its 90-day briefing on the situation in Haiti. Special Representative and Head of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) María Isabel Salvador will brief the Council on recent political, security, and humanitarian developments in the country and on the Secretary-General's latest report on BINUH. The report is expected on 11 April.

Council members might call for an additional meeting to discuss the Secretary-General's 24 February letter containing strategic recommendations on the UN's role in support of Haiti and evaluate options for Council action to implement the Secretary-General's recommendations.

BINUH's mandate expires on 15 July, and the authorisation of the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission to Haiti ends on 2 October.

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 on the civilian population amid widespread impunity.

In March, gangs continued to extend and consolidate their hold within and beyond Port-au-Prince, prompting warnings of the possible imminent fall of the capital. On 25 March, an MSS soldier was killed in an attack by gang members during an operation in the Artibonite region. Among other attacks, gangs recently targeted several local media outlets. In a 20 March statement, UNESCO representative in Haiti Eric Voli Bi expressed alarm at these attacks, noting that they are part of a strategy to silence journalists and "prevent Haitians from getting information about the situation in a transparent manner".

The situation of children is particularly concerning. In a recent report, Amnesty International highlighted violations, including the recruitment of children by gangs, killings and injuries of children, and rape and other forms of sexual violence.

The instability has caused widespread displacement. According to an 18 March International Organization for Migration statement, intense violence has forced nearly 60,000 people to flee in just one month, with over one million internally displaced people across the country overall.

The humanitarian situation remains dire. In a 20 March update, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that new suspected cases of cholera in Haiti are reported daily. The statement warned about the chronic underfunding of the humanitarian response for Haiti, noting that funding for water, sanitation, and hygiene remained particularly low.

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. During a 21 March media briefing, Deputy Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Farhan Haq said that the recent US funding freeze was "having a devastating impact on the overall HIV response, including treatment and prevention" in Haiti.

On 7 March, Fritz Alphonse Jean replaced Leslie Voltaire in the Transitional Presidential Council (TPC) rotating presidency. April will mark one year since the creation of the TPC pursuant to a March 2024 agreement facilitated by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) following a dramatic surge in gang violence in February 2024. According to the 10 April 2024 Decree which created the TPC, this transitional body will exercise presidential powers until a new president is elected by 7 February 2026. This date marks the expiration of the TPC's mandate which, as established by a May 2024 Decree, cannot be extended. In January, Voltaire declared that elections would be held by the end of 2025. Transitional authorities have also committed to holding a constitutional referendum, which is currently scheduled for May.

Elections have not been held in Haiti since 2016. In a 19 February report, the International Crisis Group (ICG) noted the importance of Haiti establishing a legitimate governance. At the same time, the ICG stressed that key benchmarks for election preparation had not been met and warned that carrying out elections without the necessary security conditions could have detrimental consequences for Haiti, including "allowing gangs to play a deciding role in the vote and entrenching their power".

In October 2023, the Security Council adopted resolution 2699, authorising member states to form and deploy the MSS mission to Haiti. The resolution followed Haiti's request a year earlier for the immediate deployment of an "international specialised force" to temporarily reinforce the efforts of the HNP to combat gangs and Kenya's voluntary commitment in July 2023 to lead the mission. Resolution 2699 authorised the MSS mission for an initial period of 12 months, specifying 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.

In an October 2024 letter to the Secretary-General, Haiti requested that the MSS be transformed into a UN peacekeeping mission "as soon as possible".

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, which was ultimately withdrawn, was opposed by China and Russia, 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.

Haiti

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. Instead, the letter suggested focusing on substantially reducing gangs' territorial control in Port-au-Prince, the Artibonite Department, and over critical infrastructure as a medium-term goal. To achieve this objective, the Secretary-General proposed 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 of the Support Office would be to provide comprehensive logistic and operational support to the MSS, such as accommodation, medical capability, and support for mobility and information technology. Assessed funding would cover the MSS' logistical and operational support, while scaled-up 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. In addition, the letter proposes that the UN Support Office provide "a limited, non-lethal support package" to the HNP that would be funded mostly through voluntary contributions; and strengthened intelligence and analytical capabilities for the MSS and HNP in conducting joint operations that would be financed by peacekeeping assessed contributions. The letter also proposed establishing implementation capacity for the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on UN support to non-UN security forces, to be funded through peacekeeping assessed funds.

Regarding BINUH, the Secretary-General suggested that the mission should focus 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 acknowledged that the proposed UN support options were 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 said 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.

In a 6 March letter, Voltaire expressed support for the Secretary-General's proposal.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During a recent visit to Haiti, the UN Designated Expert on Human Rights in Haiti, William O'Neill, met with Haitian authorities, civil society representatives, and UN officials to discuss the human rights situation in the country. He also visited the Centre de Rééducation des Mineurs, a juvenile prison in Port-au-Prince, where he heard testimonies from Haitians affected by the crisis. In an 11 March press release, O'Neill said that "the risk of the capital falling under gang control is palpable" and appealed to the international community to "act without delay" to implement the commitments it has undertaken regarding the sanctions regime, the arms embargo and the reinforcement of the MSS.

Women, Peace and Security

In an update on the situation in Haiti, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security stressed that violations of women's and girls' rights in Haiti "continue with impunity". The update highlights the gender dimension of violence perpetrated by armed gangs in the country, noting that most people targeted for killing are men while "diverse women and girls comprise the majority of individuals targeted for sexual violence as a means through which criminal groups seek to control and subjugate the population". The update identifies the scarcity of access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive care; the lack of funding for the humanitarian response; and Haiti's total ban on abortion as negatively impacting the situation of women and girls in the country. Among other recommendations, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security urged Security Council members to guarantee the necessary resources for the MSS and to take "all measures" to prevent any unlawful use of force and harm to local populations by establishing "clear, mandatory and enforceable parameters that detail the operational and oversight measures for protection of civilians, including against sexual exploitation and abuse". Noting the marginalisation of Haitian women in the political transition, the update also urged Council members to ensure the full, equal, safe, and meaningful participation and leadership of diverse women in all peace, security, and political processes in 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 in the Secretary-General's 24 February letter is likely to be a key issue for the Security Council in April. 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 carry out its mandate more effectively and assume new responsibilities. If agreement on both the Support Office and BINUH proves difficult to achieve, members may opt to postpone consideration of the Secretary-General's recommendations regarding BINUH until July, when the Council is expected to renew the mission's mandate.

The influx of weapons in the country, mainly coming from the US, is another significant issue. The resolution could also demand that UN member states, in particular countries in the region, step up their efforts to ensure the full implementation of the arms embargo.

At its regular April meeting, the Council could invite O'Neill and a representative of Haitian civil society to focus the Council's attention on the deteriorating human rights situation in the country.

Haiti

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.

At the same time, positions have varied among Council members on how to appropriately respond to the security situation in Haiti. Before the Secretary-General's 24 February letter proposing the

creation of a UN Support Office for the MSS, France, the UK, and the US expressed support for the MSS' transformation into a peace-keeping operation. Conversely, China and Russia have opposed this option during past negotiations on Haiti.

With the Council's attention focused on other crises and with adjustments in US policy following the inauguration of the new administration still underway, it seems that Council members are still determining how to respond to the Secretary-General's proposal.

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

Colombia

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing from Special Representative and Head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu on recent developments in Colombia and the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on the mission, which was circulated to Council members on 26 March (S/2025/188). A civil society representative is also expected to brief.

The verification mission's mandate expires on 31 October.

Key Recent Developments

The first quarter of 2025 witnessed an escalation of hostilities in several departments in Colombia. The north-eastern region of Catatumbo in the Norte de Santander department, which borders Venezuela, experienced a particularly severe deterioration in the security situation, described by the UN as "the gravest escalation of violence the country" since the signing in 2016 of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace between the government of Colombia and the former rebel group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP).

Starting on 15 January, violence intensified in Catatumbo between the guerrilla group Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) and the 33rd Front, a branch of the Estado Mayor de los Bloques y Frentes (EMBF), which has splintered from the general staff of the dissident group of the former FARC-EP that identifies itself as the Estado Mayor Central Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (EMC). The armed groups have traditionally fought over control of coca crops and drug trafficking corridors in the area. Violence started after a truce between the groups that had held since 2018 broke down in early January.

According to an update from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) published on 21 March, more than 80 civilians were killed, including social leaders and six former FARC-EP members. Approximately 80,800 people have been affected by the violence, including some 52,000 who have been displaced and more than 20,000 others who have faced restrictions on mobility, in what OCHA described as the largest humanitarian crisis in the region in three decades.

In a 20 March statement, several independent human rights

experts appointed by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) said that armed groups have also reportedly subjected civilians in Norte de Santander to "extrajudicial executions, acts tantamount to enforced disappearances, sexual and gender-based violence particularly against women and girls, human trafficking, and the recruitment of children", noting that such acts constitute grave violations of international law that must be investigated and perpetrators held accountable. OCHA has also warned that the persistence of actions by armed groups to exercise social control of the population, such as restrictions on mobility and recruitment, "creates a high risk of further episodes of mass violence".

On 17 January, Colombian President Gustavo Petro Urrego announced the suspension of the dialogue process that the government had been holding with the ELN as part of his "total peace" policy. Talks with the group had already stalled in May 2024 following the government's decision to conduct a regional dialogue with one of the ELN's regional fronts. The government also declared a "state of internal commotion" for the Catatumbo region on 20 January for an initial period of 90 days, which aims to provide resources to mitigate the economic and social impacts of the escalation of violence and to ensure food security, among other issues. Additionally, on 3 March, Petro announced a plan for the voluntary and compensated eradication of 25,000 hectares of coca in the Catatumbo region within 140 days with the aim of decreasing violence and weakening armed groups that profit from the drug trade.

Violence has also persisted or intensified in other parts of the country in the first quarter of 2025. OCHA's 21 March update reported humanitarian emergencies in the departments of Chocó, Cauca, Antioquia, Sur de Bolívar, Arauca, and Córdoba due to the actions of armed groups. It further stressed that the number of people displaced in mass events reported in the first two months of 2025 alone exceeded the total number of people displaced in all of 2024.

At the Council's latest quarterly meeting on Colombia, held on 22 January, Ruiz Massieu noted that Catatumbo is like other regions in the country where lack of state presence has created a vacuum in which armed groups continue fighting for territorial and social control. He emphasised that the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement "is as central as ever to lasting solutions for preventing and resolving the causes of armed conflict", highlighting the

UN DOCUMENTS ON COLOMBIA Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9843 (22 January) was the latest quarterly meeting on Colombia.

Colombia

importance of bringing public services, legal economies, and development opportunities to conflict-affected areas.

Armando Wouriyu Valbuena—a representative of the Special High-Level Instance for Ethnic Groups (IEANPE), a body created by the 2016 agreement to monitor the implementation of provisions related to the agreement’s ethnic chapter—and Diego Tovar, a former FARC-EP combatant and signatory to the 2016 peace agreement, also delivered statements at the meeting. Among other issues, they called for the swift implementation of the security guarantees provisions of the 2016 agreement, including the public policy to dismantle illegal armed groups and criminal organisations, which the National Commission on Security Guarantees (NCSG)—a body established by the agreement—presented in September 2023. Wouriyu called on the NCSG to address the disproportionate targeting of ethnic communities, while Tovar also stressed the need for armed groups participating in “total peace” dialogues to commit to respecting international humanitarian law.

The Secretary-General’s report says that the crisis in Catatumbo has highlighted the challenging landscape for dialogues in the framework of “total peace”. It further notes that following the fragmentation of some groups involved in talks with the government, “the focus has shifted from national talks to dialogues with a narrower scope and more localized reach”. One such process is with the EMBF, which has remained in a dialogue process with the government after splitting from the EMC’s general staff. A ceasefire between the government and the EMBF, which was agreed in 2023, is in effect until 15 April.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 22 January, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights presented a report to the HRC on Colombia’s human rights situation. The report assesses the impact of territorial violence and the internal armed conflict on human rights and civic space in 2024, focusing on 26 situations in 96 municipalities. It describes actions by non-state armed groups to maintain social control, including recruitment of children, threats against the educational community, and gender-based violence. Among other findings, the report references 15 verified human rights violations by members of the security forces, including allegations of torture; cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment; and arbitrary detentions and discrimination. In a press release issued on 24 February, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk stressed the crucial need for the protection of civilians and “urged the authorities to take immediate measures to protect Indigenous Peoples, particularly those at extreme risk due to the ongoing internal armed conflicts”.

In a 27 February press release, UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants Gehad Madi called for strengthened cooperation between Colombia and Panama to protect the human rights of all people on the move in the region, expressing concern over the use of the Darien jungle as a migratory route. In this regard, Madi called for joint responsibility to ensure protection for migrants and refugees, urging both countries to augment their asylum and human rights protection systems and to fulfil obligations under international human rights and refugee laws.

Key Issues and Options

An overarching priority for the Council remains supporting the full implementation of the 2016 peace agreement. As Colombia prepares for presidential elections in 2026, members may wish to continue emphasising the importance of continued focus on that objective. Council members have welcomed Petro’s expressed commitment to accelerate implementation of the accord, including through the “rapid action response plan” that the president announced during an 11 July 2024 Security Council meeting. There appears to be some concern about future progress, including due to the recent departure from the government of key figures such as former Interior

Minister Juan Fernando Cristo, who had overseen implementation of the “rapid action response plan”, and former Minister of Foreign Affairs Luis Gilberto Murillo Urrutia. Council members could meet informally with Colombia’s new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Laura Sarabia, to receive more information about the government’s plans to advance the implementation of the peace agreement in the remainder of the president’s term, which ends in August 2026.

A key objective for the Council is supporting transitional justice efforts in the country, including the work of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP), the judicial component of the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Non-Repitition established by the 2016 agreement. While members continue emphasising the importance of upholding the SJP’s autonomy, they have also increasingly been encouraging the Court to begin issuing restorative sentences. Some members apparently feel that it will be opportune to commence this crucial—and potentially polarising—stage before the start of the electoral period in the country. An option would be for Council members to interact informally with the SJP’s new president, Judge Alejandro Ramelli, to discuss the challenges facing the SJP and the envisioned timelines for the handing down of restorative sentences.

How to support relief efforts for conflict-affected communities is another issue. OCHA’s 2025 Community Priorities Response Plan (CPRP) for Colombia requests \$342 million to assist 13.5 million people, with needs being driven by “the escalating impacts of armed conflict, the rising frequency of climate-related disasters, and the growing displacement of vulnerable populations”. There are concerns regarding the effects of US funding cuts for foreign aid, since 70 percent of funding for Colombia’s 2024 CPRP came from the US. At the meeting on Colombia in April, some Council members may choose to call on donors to enhance their support for humanitarian efforts in the country.

Council Dynamics

Council members are generally united in their support for the peace process in Colombia and for the verification mission’s work.

It remains to be seen how the approach of the administration of US President Donald Trump to Colombia may affect Council dynamics on the file. On 26 January, shortly after the January Council session on Colombia, there was a tense exchange between Petro and Trump, when Petro criticised US treatment of deportees, refusing to allow two planes returning Colombian migrants to land in Colombia. In response, Trump threatened to impose 25 percent tariffs on Colombian goods entering the US, eventually leading Petro to agree to the resumption of deportation flights from the US.

New elected member Panama shares a border with Colombia and has an interest in the cross-border effects of the activities of armed groups in Colombia. Panama also has a thematic focus on countering transnational crime. At the January Council meeting, it highlighted the significant risks faced by forcibly displaced persons and those in situations of irregular migration, including vulnerability to human trafficking, forced labour, or sexual exploitation.

Looking ahead, Colombia is running uncontested for a seat on the Security Council in 2026–2027, with elections scheduled to take place in June.

The UK is the penholder on Colombia.

Syria

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

On 13 March, Syrian interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa signed a constitutional declaration covering a five-year transitional period. The declaration stipulates that Islam must be the religion of the president and that Islamic jurisprudence is the main source of legislation. It also mandates an independent judiciary, freedom of expression, media freedoms, and guarantees for women's political, educational and working rights.

After the signing of the constitutional declaration, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen welcomed “moves towards restoring the rule of law” and noted that “this development potentially fills an important legal vacuum”. He added that implementation will be “key”, along with efforts to ensure transitional governance. The constitutional declaration, however, was rejected by Kurdish political entities that have criticised the document for granting too much power to the executive and for failing to guarantee the rights of Syria's various national and religious groups.

On 29 March, Sharaa announced the formation of Syria's new transitional government. The cabinet comprises 23 ministers from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds—including members from Alawite, Christian, Druze and Kurdish backgrounds. Only one woman is in the cabinet, the minister of social affairs and labour. The transitional government does not have a prime minister, and Sharaa is expected to lead the executive branch in his role as interim president. Sharaa said that the new government will strive to rebuild a united Syria during the transitional period, which is expected to last around five years until elections can be held.

The caretaker authorities continue to face significant challenges in rebuilding Syria and fostering social unity. From 6 to 10 March, sectarian violence between the caretaker authorities and their affiliates on the one hand and Alawite fighters loyal to Assad on the other hand reportedly left around 1,000 civilians dead—including due to revenge killings—in Syria's coastal governates of Latakia and Tartous.

In response to this violence, on 9 March, Sharaa announced the formation of an independent fact-finding committee to identify those responsible for the mass killings and bring them to justice. The committee was mandated to submit a report to the interim presidency within 30 days. He also announced the formation of an additional committee to maintain public peace and reconciliation towards national unity. According to media reports, Sharaa has stressed that he is ready to punish “even among those closest” to him for complicity in the killings and alluded to a lack of coordination between Syria's military forces and “outside groups” loyal to the military, which led to “many violations”.

On 10 March, Council members met in closed consultations to discuss these developments, during which Pedersen briefed on the situation. Council members apparently urged the caretaker authorities to swiftly ensure that violence ended, to protect civilians, and to pursue accountability for those responsible for the violence.

During the consultations, Russia and the US announced that they

would be circulating a draft Security Council presidential statement to address the escalation in violence. Adopted on 14 March, the statement condemned the violence, called on all parties to cease any further violence or inflammatory activities to ensure accountability and the protection of all Syrians, regardless of ethnicity or religion. It also reaffirmed the Council's “strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria” and highlighted the importance of implementing “an inclusive, Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, facilitated by the United Nations and based on the key principles listed in resolution 2254”. (Adopted on 18 December 2015, resolution 2254 focused on a political solution to the Syria crisis.) (For more information, see our 14 March *What's in Blue* story.)

In a 13 March statement marking 14 years since the start of the Syrian people's peaceful protests against Assad, the Secretary-General noted that despite renewed hope following the fall of Assad, a “brighter future hangs in the balance”. He stressed the need for the caretaker authorities to make good on their commitments to build a new Syria based on inclusive and credible foundations for all Syrians and asserted that the UN stood ready to support an inclusive political transition.

On the security front, the caretaker authorities signed an agreement with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) group on 10 March, integrating its military and civil institutions into those of the Syrian state as part of the authorities' aim to establish control over the entire country. The SDF militarily controls most of the territory in Syria's northeast and poses a significant obstacle to Syria's unity. They were a crucial partner for the US in the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) in the region. Türkiye, however, views the SDF as a terrorist organisation because of its close links with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has conducted a decades-long secessionist insurgency against Türkiye.

The agreement came just weeks after the PKK declared a ceasefire with Türkiye. While Ankara welcomed the deal between the SDF and the Syrian caretaker authorities, military clashes between the SDF and Turkish-backed forces—as well as Turkish airstrikes—have continued in northeast Syria, raising questions about the implementation of the agreement.

Along the Syria-Lebanon border, seven Lebanese civilians, including a young girl, were killed in two days of clashes that started on 15 March after Syria's caretaker authorities accused Hezbollah of abducting three Syrian soldiers, taking them into Lebanon, and then killing them. As a result, Syrian forces targeted positions along the border, leading to retaliatory fire from the Lebanese army. Hezbollah denied the claims that they were responsible for the abductions. Syrian and Lebanese authorities announced a ceasefire agreement on 17 March, and on 27 March, they signed an agreement for cooperation on border demarcation.

In his briefing to the Security Council on 25 March, Pedersen stressed that comprehensive security sector reform and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration are needed, and he encouraged the caretaker authorities to seek the UN's support on these issues. He also called on the caretaker authorities to “robustly” address the issue of foreign fighters in their senior ranks. This point was also raised by

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2254](#) (18 December 2015) focused exclusively on a political solution to the Syria crisis and was adopted unanimously. [Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2025/4](#) (14 March 2025) condemned sectarian violence perpetrated in Latakia and Tartous and called for accountability and the protection of all Syrians, regardless of ethnicity or religion. [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

China, France, Russia, the US and other Council members during the meeting and in the Council's 14 March presidential statement.

In March, Israel reportedly continued to conduct various military operations in the occupied Golan, as well as airstrikes targeting military infrastructure formerly held by ousted Assad forces as far into Syrian territory as Damascus and Homs. Israel has said that it will continue to operate against any threat to its security and has made clear that it distrusts the caretaker authorities because of Sharaa's past involvement with terrorist groups. Despite continued calls from the international community for Israel to withdraw from the demilitarised buffer zone established by the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement, they continue to reinforce positions in the area.

On the humanitarian front, Syria remains one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world, with approximately 16.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. While ongoing hostilities in various regions, dire economic conditions, and critical underfunding hamper humanitarian efforts, there are increased demands due to massive numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees returning to their homes. According to UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria Adam Abdelmoula, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported around 1.2 million IDPs and refugees had already returned since December 2024 and projects up to 3.5 million more in the coming months. Abdelmoula also highlighted, however, that humanitarian access has improved significantly since December 2024, and the UN is now able to coordinate the delivery of aid in areas that had been previously inaccessible to it, such as northeast Syria.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 9 March press release, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk called for an immediate end to civilian killings in coastal areas in northwest Syria. Following serious escalations of violent attacks reportedly launched by elements of the former government and other local armed men, the UN Human Rights Office has also received alarming reports of entire families, including women, children and hors de combat fighters, being killed. The High Commissioner urged "prompt, transparent and impartial investigations into all the killings and other violations, and accountability for those responsible, in line with international law norms and standards". Among other recommendations, Türk emphasised the urgent need for a comprehensive transitional justice process that is nationally-owned, inclusive and centred on truth, justice and accountability.

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. An important aim for the Council is to maintain a unified approach to addressing these issues and to promote a constructive role for the UN in this process.

Another key issue for the Council is how to improve the security situation in Syria. In this regard, Israel's continued presence in the Golan buffer zone and its airstrikes into Syrian territory undermine the caretaker authorities' control over the territory and their attempts to foster stability. Similarly, clashes in northeast Syria, sectarian

violence, the threat of an ISIS resurgence and foreign terrorist fighters, and any perceived threat by Iranian proxies such as Hezbollah may all be issues that the Council could seek to address through a dedicated meeting or outcome document on Syria's security and territorial integrity.

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 IDPs, particularly given the dire forecast of funding shortfalls. During the Council's 25 March meeting on Syria, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Tom Fletcher appealed for urgent investment in Syria's recovery, reconstruction and development amid a situation in which 16 million Syrians are lacking sufficient food, water, shelter and medicine. Council members could consider calling for an international conference to mobilise support for Syria, including by securing additional funding for a humanitarian response and addressing key issues such as economic development and reconstruction.

In this context, the Council could also request the UNHCR to brief on the humanitarian challenges of repatriating Syrian refugees. Council members could also encourage UN member states to support the humanitarian response plan for Syria of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the Council's monthly meetings on the file.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Since the ouster of Assad in December 2024, Council members have adopted a "wait-and-see" approach to allow the caretaker authorities the time and space necessary to steer the transitional process. The international community has generally welcomed commitments made by the caretaker authorities on their vision for transition and Syria's future.

The mass killings in Syria's coastal regions in early March, however, have served as a signal that commitments made need to be followed by tangible action and implementation to ensure that such violent escalations are not repeated. In the context of escalations in sectarian violence and persistent challenges regarding Syrian unity, such as those in the Alawite, Kurdish, and Druze communities, the actions of the new transitional government will determine the Security Council's approach to the dossier in the coming weeks. Several Council members are likely to look positively at the diverse religious and ethnic composition of the transitional government and closely monitor its progress on Council priorities, such as the protection of all civilians and the promotion of accountability for all violations of international law. During the Council's 25 March meeting on Syria, the US called for "genuine efforts at reconciliation" with the Alawite community and criticised the caretaker authorities for not having "meaningfully" engaged in a political process that includes all Syrian sects. It also raised concerns regarding the constitutional declaration and noted that it will be "watching closely who is selected for cabinet positions".

On its part, at the 25 March meeting, Russia suggested that OCHA consider expanding its presence in the coastal region, including through opening a suboffice, to keep the situation under control and assess the situation more closely. Members may begin to intensify demands that the transitional government increase its

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coordination with the UN—including with the Special Envoy’s office—such as by seeking further support on matters pertaining to an inclusive political process and transitional justice.

A known obstacle for the authorities in Damascus is heavy sanctions, which hamper the country’s economic progress and foster instability. Many members agree that lifting sanctions and providing financial support to the caretaker authorities during this period are critical. The European Union and the UK have already taken steps to gradually lift the sanctions and restrictions previously imposed on the Assad government. Furthermore, on 17 March, the 2025 Brussels IX Conference on “Supporting the future of Syria and the region” convened with the objectives of mobilising humanitarian and financial aid for Syria and to rally political support for a comprehensive, credible political solution. The conference amassed \$6.3 billion in pledges from donor countries; however, the US refrained from

making any pledges in line with the Trump administration’s wider decision to freeze international aid. The US has also not taken any decision to lift its sanctions on Syria and seems to have adopted a more wary diplomatic approach to the caretaker authorities.

Israel’s presence and military activities in Syria are also a point of contention between Council members. During the Council’s closed consultations on 10 March, there were different views between some Council members and the US on the need for the Council to push back against Israel’s actions in Syria, and this dynamic also featured in negotiations on the draft presidential statement. Many members believe Israel’s actions are fostering tensions and instability in an already fragile Syria, but the US sees its actions are defensive in nature and tied to ensuring its national security, in line with Israel’s position.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Expected Council Action

In April, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi will brief the Security Council. The briefing will focus on challenges related to forced displacement across the globe. The session is expected to be interactive, with the High Commissioner responding to observations and questions from members during the session. This type of interactivity is atypical for a public briefing, although a similar format is used when the heads of military and police components of peace operations brief the Council.

No outcome is expected.

Background and Key Recent Developments

By the end of 2023, the most recent year for which the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has complete data, UNHCR estimated that the number of people forcibly displaced across the globe was 117.3 million, a figure that includes refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), and others in need of international protection.

The magnitude of this crisis continues to grow. Through 2023, the number of people forcibly displaced increased every year over the previous 12 years. By May 2024, UNHCR stated that over 120 million people were forcibly displaced as a consequence of “persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations”. This is more than double the figure of nearly 60 million people forcibly displaced a decade ago.

Over the past three decades, the Security Council has paid more attention to the links between displacement and threats to international peace and security. Although the Council has yet to adopt a stand-alone resolution on displaced persons in armed conflict, it has highlighted this issue in several outcomes, including resolutions 1265, 1674 and 2417:

- Resolution 1265 stressed the particular vulnerability of IDPs and refugees in conflict situations.
- Resolution 1674 recalled the prohibition against the forcible

displacement of civilians in conflict, urged the international community to provide support and assistance to enable states to fulfil their responsibilities regarding the protection of refugees and reaffirmed the need to maintain the security and civilian character of refugee and IDP camps.

- Resolution 2417 stressed the link between conflict-related food insecurity and forced displacement.

Furthermore, the Council commonly refers to displacement in country-specific situations, although the emphasis and prominence given to the issue vary depending on the context.

The High Commissioner for Refugees has briefed the Council several times about specific country situations on the Council’s agenda, such as the Sahel in December 2012, Syria in December 2015, and Myanmar in February 2018. In May 2023, the High Commissioner also briefed Council members during “any other business” on the influx of refugees into Sudan’s neighbouring countries, presenting an overview of this displacement’s potential impact on regional stability.

In addition to country-specific briefings, the Council typically receives an annual briefing under the agenda item “Briefing by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees”, which allows for a general update from the High Commissioner on refugees in various settings on the Council’s agenda. It is in this context that Grandi is providing this month’s briefing to the Council.

Grandi’s most recent briefing to the Security Council took place on 30 May 2024. During this briefing, he underscored the lack of compliance with international humanitarian law by parties to conflicts across the globe, with the “brutal conduct of hostilities” compelling civilians “to flee in terror”. In this context, he referred to displacement crises caused by conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Gaza, Myanmar, Sudan, Syria, and Ukraine.

Approximately 73 percent of forcibly displaced persons come from five countries—Afghanistan, Ukraine, Sudan, Syria, and Venezuela—which have been a focus of the Council’s work in recent

UN DOCUMENTS ON BRIEFINGS BY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2417 (24 May 2018) was on the link between armed conflict and food insecurity. It strongly condemned the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, as well as the unlawful denial of humanitarian access. S/RES/1674 (28 April 2006) was on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. It expressed grave concern at the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons and the use of such weapons on civilians affected by armed conflict. S/RES/1265 (17 September 1999) was the Council’s first thematic resolution on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9641** (30 May 2024) was a briefing to the Council by the High Commissioner for Refugees.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees

years. High numbers of forcibly displaced also continue to be a feature of several other conflicts on the Council’s agenda, such as those in the DRC, South Sudan, Myanmar and several situations in the Middle East.

Key Issues and Options

Key issues for the Council include how to:

- Address the root causes of displacement in various conflicts;
- Compel member states to uphold international humanitarian law and international human rights law in response to displacement crises;
- Promote unhindered humanitarian access to forcibly displaced populations;
- Address the differential effects of displacement on men, women and children; and
- Encourage member states to provide greater financial support to mitigate the dire humanitarian effects of forced displacement, especially given the financial crisis facing UNHCR.

Council members may use the opportunity to elicit information from Grandi on country-specific situations and how member states can better advance principled, safe, voluntary, dignified and informed refugee returns. Some members may also suggest ways to protect IDPs and refugees from sexual/gender-based violence, abuse, and exploitation.

In the future, the Council could consider pursuing a stand-alone resolution or presidential statement on displaced persons in armed

conflict to provide more consistent and comprehensive guidance to member states on this issue, including on the facilitation of durable solutions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of IDPs and refugees and their local integration or resettlement.

Council members could also consider convening private meetings or informal interactive dialogues to discuss the many challenges related to displacement in country-specific situations. Unlike closed consultations, these meeting formats allow for the participation of non-Council member states. As a result, they could enable a frank exchange of ideas among Council members and affected countries that may be conducive to strategic thinking and problem-solving with regard to particular displacement crises.

Council Dynamics

The Council is generally united in its support for UNHCR and the work of the High Commissioner. It appears, however, that political sensitivities in the Council over issues such as Gaza, Ukraine and migration to Europe across the Mediterranean have affected Council deliberations on the issue of displacement, with mutual recriminations exchanged by members over the causes of such crises and the factors that exacerbate them.

Several Council members have highlighted the connection between climate change and displacement. In this regard, France, Guyana, Sierra Leone, and Slovenia noted this linkage during the High Commissioner’s 30 May 2024 briefing.

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council will hold its quarterly open debate on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” (MEPQ). France, the Council president for the month, intends to convene the debate at the ministerial level. French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Noël Barrot is expected to chair the meeting. UN Secretary-General António Guterres is the anticipated briefer.

Council members may convene additional meetings during the month and evaluate whether any Council action is required.

Key Recent Developments

April’s quarterly debate will take place at a critical juncture in the Israel-Hamas war following the collapse of the ceasefire agreement between the parties and the resurgence of hostilities in Gaza. On 18 March, Israel resumed large-scale military operations in the territory for the first time since the first phase of the ceasefire went into effect in January, launching airstrikes that killed over 400 people, including at least 170 children and 80 women, according to figures cited by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The strikes have continued since then, reportedly pushing Gaza’s total death toll since the beginning of the conflict past 50,000 and

newly displacing an estimated 142,000 people. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have also resumed ground operations in the territory, reasserting control over parts of the Netzarim corridor separating northern and southern Gaza and moving troops into other areas across the enclave, which Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz has threatened to permanently annex. Hamas has condemned the escalation and called for a return to the ceasefire while also launching retaliatory rocket fire into Israel.

UN staff have been among the casualties of the hostilities. On 19 March, one staff member from the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) was killed and six others were wounded when strikes hit a UN compound in central Gaza. In a 24 March statement, Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Stéphane Dujarric said that “[b]ased on the information currently available, the strikes... were caused by an Israeli tank”. The statement noted that the compound was well known to the conflict parties and stressed that the parties were bound by international law to protect the inviolability of UN premises, without which UN staff “face intolerable risks as they work to save the lives of civilians”. Dujarric announced that the UN would consequently “reduce the Organization’s footprint in Gaza, even as humanitarian needs soar and our concern over the protection

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2735 (10 June 2024) welcomed the proposal for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas that the US announced on 31 May 2024. The resolution was adopted with 14 votes in favour and one abstention (Russia). S/RES/2728 (25 March 2024) demanded an immediate ceasefire for the month of Ramadan leading to a lasting sustainable ceasefire. It also demanded the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. It was adopted with 14 votes in favour and one abstention (US). S/RES/2720 (22 December 2023) requested the Secretary-General to appoint a Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator to establish a UN mechanism for accelerating humanitarian consignments to Gaza. It was adopted with 13 votes in favour and two abstentions (Russia and the US). S/RES/2334 (23 December 2016) condemned Israeli settlements and called for immediate steps to prevent violence against civilians, including acts of terror. It was adopted with 14 votes in favour and a US abstention.

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

of civilians intensifies”. On 28 March, the Security Council held a private meeting on the humanitarian situation and protection of aid workers in Gaza.

Israeli officials have described the renewed military operation as a response to Hamas’ rejection of US proposals to extend the first phase of the ceasefire, which expired on 1 March. On 2 March, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu endorsed a proposed “framework” for a “temporary ceasefire for the Ramadan and Pass-over period”, which he attributed to US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff. Under this plan—which proposed different terms than the initial ceasefire agreement that the parties had agreed to in January—Hamas would release half of the 59 hostages it is still holding on the first day that the framework goes into effect and the remaining hostages on the last day, with the parties negotiating a permanent ceasefire in the interim. In the same statement, Netanyahu said that Hamas had rejected the proposal and that Israel would therefore prevent the entry of humanitarian aid and commercial supplies into Gaza, adding that there would be “additional consequences” if Hamas did not change its position. (For more information about Gaza’s humanitarian situation, see our 17 March and 27 March *What’s in Blue* stories.)

Hamas reportedly described the US-proposed framework as a violation of the original ceasefire agreement and characterised Israel’s decision to block humanitarian aid as “cheap blackmail” and a “war crime”. According to media reports, the parties have subsequently exchanged a series of modified proposals to halt the hostilities, but they have been unable to reach an agreement. Israel apparently insists on extending the first phase of the ceasefire to facilitate the release of more hostages under a temporary truce, while Hamas seeks to advance to the second stage, which would make the ceasefire permanent. In a 17 March statement announcing the resumption of Israel’s military operations, Netanyahu said that he had ordered the IDF to “take strong action” against Hamas following the impasse in negotiations, adding that Israel “will, from now on, act against Hamas with increasing military strength”.

Violence has also escalated in the West Bank, where Israel has been conducting what it has described as a large-scale counterterrorism operation since 21 January. Delivering the 21 March briefing on the implementation of resolution 2334 of 23 December 2016, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process ad interim Sigrid Kaag said that the operation is the longest conducted by Israel in the West Bank since 2002 and has included airstrikes, the deployment of tanks, and the destruction of residential buildings and civilian infrastructure, displacing 40,000 people from the northern part of the territory. More broadly, a report dated 18 March from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights detailed an expansion of Israeli settlements and a rise in settler violence in the West Bank since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Developments concerning the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) have also continued to generate controversy. On 30 January, two Israeli laws restricting UNRWA’s operations entered into force. One piece of legislation prohibits Israeli officials from having contact with UNRWA or anyone acting on its behalf. The other prohibits UNRWA from operating on Israeli territory, which the country interprets as encompassing

the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), including East Jerusalem, where UNRWA’s West Bank field office is based. In a 10 March statement, UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said that the agency has faced “serious operational challenges” since the laws came into effect. Israeli authorities have exerted increasing pressure on the agency to vacate its premises and stop providing services in East Jerusalem, according to the statement, and have “effectively” expelled international staff from the West Bank by denying them visas. Lazzarini warned that dismantling UNRWA without a political process that would hand over the agency’s responsibilities to “empowered and prepared Palestinian institutions” risks further destabilising the OPT and wider region.

The previous quarterly debate on MEPQ took place on 20 January, which was the same day that US President Donald Trump returned to office. After his inauguration, Trump made a series of remarks suggesting that the US would “take over” Gaza after the war and that neighbouring countries would resettle displaced Palestinians, who would not have a right to return to the territory. The comments were strongly rejected by Palestinians and much of the international community, including Arab countries in the region, which accelerated discussions on an alternative plan for Gaza’s reconstruction and governance.

At an extraordinary summit held on 4 March in Cairo, the League of Arab States (LAS) endorsed a plan proposed by Egypt that calls for \$53 billion over five years to build housing, critical infrastructure, and industrial zones in Gaza without displacing civilians, initially under the management of an administrative committee of Palestinian technocrats that would hand over control of the territory to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) after a six-month transitional period. The plan also calls for the Security Council to deploy peacekeepers to Gaza and the West Bank to protect both Palestinians and Israelis, with the ultimate aim of preserving the viability of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and preventing the resurgence of hostilities.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In an 18 March press release, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory Francesca Albanese said that Palestinians face a “serious risk of mass ethnic cleansing” as Israel continues its operations in Gaza and the West Bank. Referring to the mass casualties and displacement that these operations have caused, Albanese said that Israel’s conduct “amounts to a genocidal campaign to erase Palestinians as a people”. The Special Rapporteur urged member states to support the arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in November 2024 for Netanyahu and former Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity. (The ICC also sought arrest warrants for Hamas leaders Yahya Sinwar, Ismail Haniyeh, and Mohammed Deif, all of whom were later killed in Israeli operations.) Albanese additionally called for targeted sanctions, the halt of all arms transfers, and the prosecution of those accountable for crimes in the OPT, among other recommendations.

On 18 March, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights published a report about the human rights consequences of Israel’s settlement policies in the OPT, including East Jerusalem. Covering the period from 1 November 2023 to 31 October 2024, the report details Israel’s activities in the territory and steps taken by the government to militarise the settler movement further, finding a monthly average of 118 incidents of settler violence. In a press release accompanying the report, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk described Israel’s settlement policy, its acts of annexation, and related discriminatory legislation and measures as breaches of international law. Türk also said that Israel’s “transfer...of parts of its own

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civilian population into the territory it occupies amounts to a war crime". He called on Israel to abide by the July 2024 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice—which found that Israel's continued presence in the OPT is unlawful—and immediately cease all new settlement activities and evacuate all settlers from the territory, among other measures.

Women, Peace and Security

In a 13 March report, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the OPT and Israel examined sexual, reproductive, and other forms of gender-based violence carried out by the Israeli security forces and Israeli settlers since 7 October 2023. The report documents the disproportionate impact on women and girls of air and artillery strikes in Gaza and cases of "deliberate targeting and killing of civilian women and girls" by members of the Israeli security forces, as well as specific gendered harms "suffered as a result of starvation as a method of warfare, forcible transfer, extermination and collective punishment". Among other findings, the report highlights the systematic destruction of sexual and reproductive healthcare facilities across the Gaza Strip and "widespread and systematic abuse and sexual and gender-based violence" in Israeli detention. The report stresses that the "frequency, prevalence and severity of sexual and gender-based crimes" perpetrated across the OPT has led the Commission to conclude that "sexual and gender-based violence is increasingly used as a method of war by Israel to destabilize, dominate, oppress and destroy the Palestinian people".

Key Issues and Options

The Council's continued failure to expedite an end to the war in Gaza and its inability to safeguard the viability of the two-state solution remain fundamental issues undermining the Council's credibility.

In this context, the Council's immediate concern in April is the collapse of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire agreement and the resumption of hostilities between the parties. Associated issues include the urgent need to restore humanitarian access to Gaza and ensure the protection of civilians in the territory, including UN and humanitarian personnel, as well as the remaining hostages held by Hamas and other armed groups. Given current political dynamics, Council members are unlikely to agree on a product addressing these issues, but some members may still wish to initiate a draft resolution to build political pressure and raise visibility in light of the increasing severity of the crisis and the apparent impasse in negotiations between the parties.

If the humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate due to the halt in aid, Council members may also wish to receive an update from the UN Secretariat on the risk of famine in the territory. OCHA could submit this update to the Council in the form of a "white note" under its mandate in resolution 2417 of 24 May 2018, which condemned the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare and requested the Secretary-General to "swiftly report" to the Council on situations in which the risk of conflict-induced famine and widespread food insecurity are present. (The Council held a briefing in response to a white note that OCHA previously submitted in February 2024, as well as a briefing on the risk of famine in northern Gaza in November 2024 after the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Famine Review Committee warned of "a strong likelihood that famine is imminent in areas within the northern Gaza Strip".) Additionally, members could consider inviting OCHA or a civil society representative to brief on the humanitarian consequences of the UN's reduced footprint in Gaza.

Similar to the reporting request in resolution 2417, resolution 2730 of 24 May 2024 requested the Secretary-General to report to the Council on situations in which there are "widespread issues"

regarding the safety and security of humanitarian and UN personnel. In light of the recent death attacks on such personnel in Gaza, some Council members may also wish to receive a broader update from OCHA on this issue, building on the 28 March private meeting held in connection with the death and injuries of UNOPS staff.

With respect to longer-term political issues, some Council members may wish to initiate discussions on measures to support the LAS-endorsed plan for Gaza's post-conflict reconstruction and governance, including initiatives to mobilise funding for the proposal. Members could also request the Secretary-General to report on possible modalities for the potential UN peacekeeping mission that the plan envisions. Additionally, Council members—along with the broader UN membership—may begin informal consultations to prepare for the upcoming high-level conference on the implementation of UN resolutions on the question of Palestine and the two-state solution "for the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East". The conference—which was mandated by the General Assembly in December 2024—is scheduled to take place in June and will be co-chaired by France and Saudi Arabia.

Council Dynamics

Intractable dynamics have characterised the Council's response to the war in Gaza, which has been marked by contentious and prolonged negotiations with multiple failed adoptions. Negotiations of Council products on this file have clearly shown that it is not possible for the Council to adopt an outcome that the US, Israel's key ally at the Council, does not largely support.

Overall, the US has vetoed four draft resolutions on the war since it started on 7 October 2023. The US also vetoed a draft resolution that would have recommended that the State of Palestine be admitted to membership in the UN. China and Russia vetoed two US-proposed draft resolutions on the war, in both cases accompanied by the negative vote of the Arab member of the Council (the United Arab Emirates in 2023 and Algeria in 2024).

These political divisions have widened following Trump's return to office and the resurgence of hostilities in Gaza. The majority of Council members have called on both parties to uphold their obligations under international law, seeking a resumption of the ceasefire, restoration of humanitarian access, and the immediate and unconditional release of all remaining hostages. The US, however, has blamed the collapse of the ceasefire solely on Hamas' rejection of its extension proposals and has expressed support for Israel's renewed military operation.

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