

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

In May, China will have the presidency of the Security Council. The Council will continue to meet virtually, although members may consider holding a small number of in-person meetings later in the month depending on COVID-19 conditions.

China has chosen to initiate three signature events in May. Early in the month, it will hold a high-level briefing on “[Upholding multilateralism and the United Nations-centred international system](#)”. Wang Yi, China’s state councillor and minister for foreign affairs, is expected to chair the meeting. Volkan Bozkir, the president of the General Assembly, is expected to brief.

A high-level open debate on “[Addressing the root causes of conflict while promoting post-pandemic recovery in Africa](#)” is planned. State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi will again chair the open debate. UN Secretary-General António Guterres, Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Achim Steiner and an AU representative are the anticipated briefers. A presidential statement may be adopted.

China is also organising an open debate on “[Improving the Safety and Security of Peacekeepers](#)”. Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support Atul Khare are expected to brief. A Council product, most likely a presidential statement, is anticipated.

The annual open debate on [protection of civilians](#) (POC) in armed conflict will be held in May. It is expected to focus on the protection of medical care. Secretary-General Guterres and ICRC President Peter Maurer are expected to brief.

The Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the [UN Assistance Mission for Iraq \(UNAMI\)](#). Special Representative and head of UNAMI Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert is scheduled to brief the Council. The sixth report of the Special Adviser and head of the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by

Da’esh/ISIL (UNITAD) is also anticipated.

Other Middle East issues include meetings on:

- [Syria](#), the monthly briefings on political and humanitarian issues and the use of chemical weapons;

- [Lebanon](#), on the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004), which called for the disarmament of all militias and the extension of government control over all Lebanese territory;
- [Yemen](#), the monthly meeting on recent developments; and
- [The Middle East \(including the Palestinian Question\)](#), also the monthly meeting.

During the month, the Council is planning to vote on a draft resolution to renew the [South Sudan sanctions regime](#)—including targeted sanctions and the arms embargo—and the mandate of the South Sudan Sanctions Committee Panel of Experts.

It is also expected to adopt a resolution renewing the mandate of the [UN Interim Security Force for Abyei \(UNISFA\)](#) and extending the mission’s support for the [Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism \(JBVMM\)](#).

Other African issues include meetings on:

- [Sudan](#), on the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS);
- [Libya](#), on the UN Support Mission for Libya (UNSMIL), on the sanctions regime, and on the ICC’s work in the country;
- [Somalia](#), on the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM); and
- [Peace and Security in Africa](#), on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel.

A debate on [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) is planned.

The Council will also meet to discuss the work of the [1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee](#).

Council members will most likely closely follow developments in [Ethiopia](#) and [Myanmar](#), among other situations.

30 April 2021

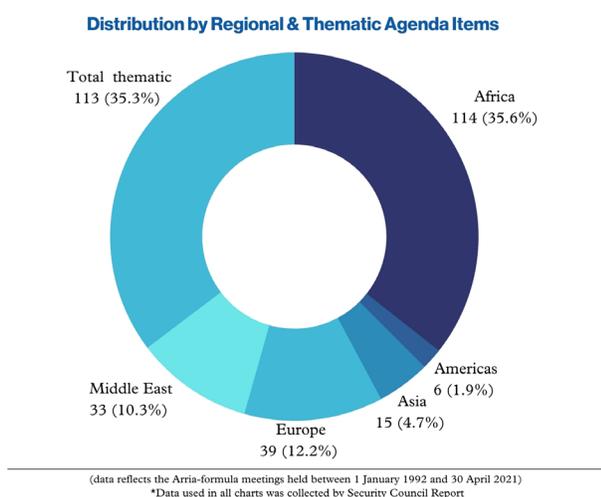
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In Hindsight: Is There a Single Right Formula for the Arria Format?

The Arria-formula meeting format was conceived as the Security Council emerged from its stagnant Cold War period and members were open to wider information sources than government officials and the UN Secretariat on the many conflicts on its agenda.

In 1992, then-Permanent Representative of Venezuela, Ambassador Diego Arria, was contacted by Fra Jozo Zovko, a Bosnian Croat priest offering an eyewitness account of the violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Because the rules of procedure made a formal audience with the Council impossible, Arria invited Council members to meet with Fra Jozo in the UN Delegates' Lounge. This new informal meeting format came to be known as the "Arria-formula". Since such meetings do not require Council consensus and allow members to opt out of participation, the Arria-formula format meant Council members could convene meetings on sensitive topics when consensus could not be reached on holding a formal meeting. By the end of April 2021, Council members had convened 320 Arria-formula meetings—207 on regional situations and 113 on thematic issues. Chart 1 below shows that African issues have remained the top focus, with more Arria-formula meetings (114) than on all other regional issues combined.



Evolving Trends

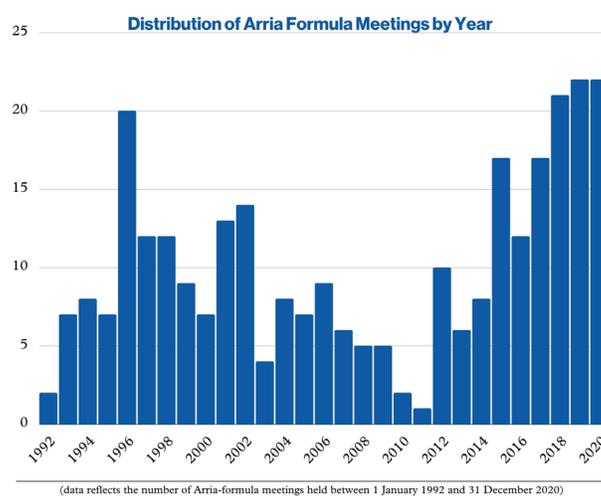
Over the years, the format and objectives of Arria-formula meetings have evolved. While they can be closed or open, Council members have gradually chosen primarily to hold open Arria-formula meetings. UNTV first broadcast an Arria-formula meeting on 8 August 2016—a discussion on the humanitarian situation in Aleppo, Syria—increasing the reach and visibility of the Arria-formula meetings. Since March 2020, all Arria-formula meetings have been held virtually, in line with the Council's rules of procedure during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chart 2 below shows that the frequency of Arria-formula meetings has fluctuated, with the 1990s seeing an average of eight meetings per year. The year 1996 was an outlier, with 20 Arria-formula meetings, many on African issues and five on the situation in the Great Lakes region alone, which focused on developments in Burundi and Rwanda.

Between 2003 and 2011, Arria-formula meetings became less frequent, with an average of just over five such meetings per year,

falling to three Arrias in total in 2010–2011.

Since 2015, the number of Arria-formula meetings has risen steadily. Council members' appetite for organising such meetings seems to have grown since they started being broadcast via UNTV in 2016. The years 2019 and 2020 each hit a record of 22 Arria-formula meetings, and 2021 is on track to meet or exceed that number, with 11 such meetings through the end of April. The rise in the use of Arria-formula meetings, given that they have traditionally been used to discuss sensitive aspects of topics difficult to cover in a formal format, may also be linked to the many divisive issues on the Council's agenda, including the situations in Crimea and Syria. The high number of Arria-formula meetings continued when the Council moved to a virtual format in 2020, possibly due to the greater accessibility to high-level participation and a wide range of briefers.



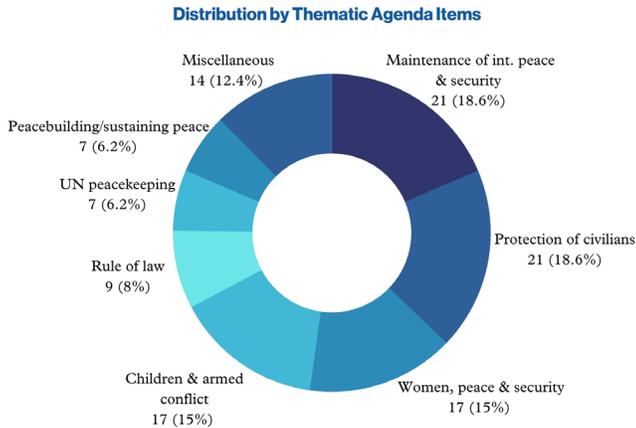
Trends have also shifted in terms of the member states that choose to organise such meetings. Since their inception, Arria-formula meetings have mostly been organised by elected Council members. In the 2000s, the P3 (France, the UK and the US) more frequently initiated such meetings or joined elected members in co-organising Arria-formula meetings. China and Russia used the Arria-formula tool sparingly until September 2020, when China co-organised, with Russia, its first Arria-formula meeting, on the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Russia, which had previously hosted only a few Arria-formula meetings in the 1990s, organised nine such meetings in the years 2020–2021 (to date); these focused on the use of chemical weapons in Syria (three), on the situation in Crimea (two), and one each on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Children and Armed Conflict, International Non-proliferation Regimes, and Universal Coercive Measures.

Since 2017, member states not on the Council have gradually joined Council members in organising Arria-formula meetings. This practice appears to facilitate a continuity of focus on particular issues, as incoming Council members can articulate a priority before entering the Council, while those rotating off the Council can continue pursuing issues of importance to them. In October 2018, for example, incoming Council members Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Germany, and Indonesia co-organised with several Council members an Arria-formula meeting on water, peace and security,

Hindsight: Is There a Single Right Formula for the Arria Format?

a curtain-raiser for the interest they would draw during their terms to the nexus between climate and security.

The thematic issues addressed in Arria-formula meetings can be seen in chart 3 below. Arria-formula meetings over the years have had a significant focus on the protection of civilians; women, peace and security; and children and armed conflict. This reflects the priorities of the P3 and like-minded elected members of the Council, which have historically been the main organisers of Arria-formula meetings.



(data reflects the Arria-formula meetings held between 1 January 1992 and 30 April 2021)

The Continuing Relevance of the Arria-Formula in a Changing Landscape

Arria-formula meetings have come a long way from their inception in the Delegates' Lounge in 1992 to the often highly publicised digital events that take place today. In light of the intensive use of this format, it is worth re-examining whether or not Arria-formula meetings are still driven by their original purpose.

The original spirit of the Arria-formula meeting was for Council members to receive crucial information that might not otherwise be available to them, particularly through civil society briefers, to help enhance their awareness of complex problems and inform their decision-making. In the 2000s, for example, Arria-formula meetings helped promote the women, peace and security agenda, as it allowed Council members to hear from female civil society briefers ahead of open debates on thematic and regional issues (such as a December 2008 Arria-formula meeting hosted by Belgium on the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo). However, while in the past there was some pushback against including NGO briefers in Council meetings, such briefers have become the new norm, and indeed the Council has committed itself, including in resolution 2242 (2015) and resolution 2419 (2018), to inviting civil society members from women-led and youth-led organisations, respectively, to brief the Council. The NGO working group on women, peace and security has noted that nine women civil society briefers addressed the Security Council in 2016, and 40 did so in 2019.

The fact that a large percentage of Arria-formula meetings organised by elected members in the years 2019–2020 addressed issues that enjoy general Council support, such as the Afghan peace process or the women, peace and security agenda, suggests that the briefers could arguably have briefed the Council in a formal meeting. This

does not mean, of course, that proposed Council briefers are always agreed to by members, and in at least one case, in March 2018, a refusal by several Council members to hear a briefing from the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation in Syria led to the swift convening of an Arria-formula meeting for that purpose. A closed Arria-formula meeting can also allow the Council to hear from briefers who may be unable to brief in an open Council meeting due to safety concerns.

While historically Arria-formula meetings would often be held as closed meetings conducive to a frank exchange of ideas, in recent years they have routinely been large open meetings that provide organisers with a platform to amplify messages on issues of importance to them. Such meetings can socialise emerging issues not yet on the Council's agenda, such as cyber threats: after its first Arria-formula discussion, co-organised by Spain and Senegal, on "Cybersecurity and International Peace and Security" in November 2016, Ukraine organised a meeting on "Hybrid Wars as a Threat to International Peace and Security" in March 2017 during which cyber threats were discussed. And this month (May 2021), China plans to host an Arria-formula on the impact of emerging technologies on international peace and security.

While elected members have found the Arria-formula format useful for highlighting their priority issues, this, and the potentially divisive impact of some Arria-formula meetings, appears to have led some Council members, and member states who are not on the Council, to question their role and to view them less as a serious forum to inform Council decisions, and more as a platform to influence public opinion.

Elected member India, for example, has publicly expressed its reservations regarding this format. Since 2003, when then-Council member Pakistan sought to organise an Arria-formula with Kashmiri dissidents, India has refrained from participating in Arria-formula meetings, save for two which were held in recent years (the most recent one being the November 2020 Arria-formula meeting on the peace process in Afghanistan). The Arria-formula meetings on the situations in Crimea and Syria are also illustrative, having become a battleground for alternative narratives promoted primarily by China and Russia, on the one hand, and the P3 (France, the UK and the US) on the other. In 2019, at least six out of the 22 Arria-formula meetings were held on topics which might be deemed divisive by some Council members (including Syria, Myanmar and climate change). In the year 2020, the number of such potentially controversial Arria-formula meetings had increased to at least ten out of 22.

Some members anticipate a risk that overuse of this tool could devalue this format, or further highlight Council disunity. However, while the goals and uses of the Arria-formula meeting have shifted in tune with changing Council needs and dynamics, the Arria-formula format evidently remains of value to Council members. It seems that many Council members find them most useful when they are strategically planned and fill a gap that cannot be filled by other means, such as a formal meeting of the Council or an Informal Interactive Dialogue. Members seeking to regain the Arria-formula's original benefit of allowing for candid interaction—among themselves, and with the briefers—might seek a different balance between open and closed Arria-formula meetings.

Status Update since our April Forecast

Mali

On 6 April, Security Council members held their quarterly briefing and consultations on Mali via video teleconference (VTC) to consider the Secretary-General's latest report on Mali (S/2021/299) and the Secretary-General's letter on a long-term roadmap setting out conditions necessary for an eventual exit strategy of the UN Multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (S/2021/300). Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix briefed at the meeting.

High-level Open VTC Debate on Mine Action

On 8 April, Council president Viet Nam convened a ministerial-level debate via VTC on "Mine action and sustaining peace: Stronger partnerships for better delivery" under the maintenance of international peace and security agenda item. Viet Nam's Foreign Minister, Bùi Thanh Sơn, chaired the meeting. The briefers were Secretary-General António Guterres; Ambassador Stefano Toscano, the Director of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining; Nguyen Thi Dieu Linh, Manager of "Project Renew" (an all-women demining team) at the Norwegian People's Aid in Viet Nam; and UNDP Goodwill Ambassador Michelle Yeoh. At the meeting, the Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2021/8), in which it called on member states and other relevant stakeholders to strengthen their efforts to implement resolution 2365 of 30 June 2017, which was the first thematic Security Council resolution on mine action.

Myanmar

On 9 April, there was an open Arria-formula meeting via VTC on recent developments in Myanmar. The meeting was initiated by the UK, and co-sponsored by Estonia, France, Ireland, Norway, and the US. The briefers were Sai Sam Kham, a civil society representative from Myanmar; Richard Horsey, Senior Adviser at International Crisis Group; and Daw Zin Mar Aung, from the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH). Myanmar's permanent representative, Kyaw Moe Tun, also participated. On 30 April, Council members held a private meeting on Myanmar with briefings from Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener and the Second Foreign Minister of Brunei Darussalam, Erywan bin Pehin Yusof.

Great Lakes

On 12 April, the Council held an open VTC, followed by closed VTC consultations on the Great Lakes region. Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region, Huang Xia, as well as Ambassador Mohamed Fathi Ahmed Edrees (Egypt), in his capacity as Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), briefed the Council. The Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) also delivered a statement. Interventions centred around the implementation of the Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region; progress in regional cooperation; the impact of COVID-19; ongoing violence, especially in the eastern region of the DRC; and illicit trade of natural resources.

Kosovo

On 13 April, the Council held a briefing via VTC on Kosovo. Special Representative and head of UNMIK, Zahir Tanin briefed on the latest Secretary-General's report (S/2021/332) and recent developments. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Nikola Selaković, and of Kosovo Donika Gërvalla-Schwartz also addressed the Council. The discussion mainly centred around developments related to the recent parliamentary elections in Kosovo and relations between Belgrade and Pristina.

Women, Peace and Security

On 14 April, the Council held its annual open debate on conflict-related sexual violence in an open VTC format. The Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten; Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Denis Mukwege; Caroline Atim, director of the South Sudan Women with Disabilities Network; and Beatrix Attinger Colijn, a women's protection adviser from MINUSCA; briefed. The Informal Experts Group on women, peace and security met on Libya on 1 April and on Mali on 29 April.

Ethiopia

On 15 April, Council members discussed the humanitarian situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia during a closed VTC under "any other business". This was the fifth meeting on the region since violence erupted in November 2020. The US had requested the meeting. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock briefed highlighting that some 4.5 million people in Tigray needed humanitarian assistance. The level of food security remained alarming, with an estimated 91 percent of the local population in need. He further expressed alarm about the widespread use of systematic rape and warned that contrary to earlier announcements, there was no sign of Eritrean troops withdrawing. On 22 April, Council members adopted a press statement (SC/14501) expressing concern over the humanitarian situation in the Tigray region. Acknowledging efforts made by the Ethiopian government to provide humanitarian assistance, they noted that challenges still remained and called for a scaled-up humanitarian response. They also expressed deep concern about allegations of human rights violations and abuses and welcomed the joint investigation by OHCHR and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. It is the first Council product on the situation.

The UN and Regional and Subregional Organisations

On Monday (19 April), as one of the signature events of its presidency, Viet Nam convened a high-level open debate via videoconference on: "Enhancing Cooperation between the United Nations and Regional and Subregional Organizations in Enhancing Confidence-building and Dialogue in Conflict Prevention and Resolution". President Nguyen Xuân Phúc chaired the meeting. UN Secretary-General António Guterres and former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon briefed. Representatives of various regional organisations also participated in the meeting. During the meeting, a presidential statement was adopted that recognised that regional and sub-regional organisations are in a good position to understand the causes of conflict in their regions and to help prevent and resolve them (S/PRST/2021/9).

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Western Sahara

On 21 April, Council members were briefed on the situation in Western Sahara by Acting Assistant-Secretary-General for Africa Michael Kingsley-Nyindah and Special Representative and head of the UN Mission for the Referendum on Western Sahara (MINURSO) Colin Stewart in a closed meeting. Draft press elements were not adopted, reportedly due to lack of consensus over the timing of the draft.

Colombia

On 21 April, the Security Council convened for an open VTC meeting on Colombia. Special Representative and head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu briefed on recent developments and the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on the mission.

1540 Committee

On 22 April, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2572, which extended, until 28 February 2022, the mandate of the 1540 Committee and its group of experts. The resolution is a straightforward renewal of the mandate of the 1540 Committee, as set out most recently in resolution 1977 of 20 April 2011, which renewed the committee's mandate for ten years.

Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

On 22 April, the Council held its quarterly open debate on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question". Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland and Rein Paulsen, the Director of OCHA's Coordination Division,

briefed. Wennesland said that the conducting of credible Palestinian elections—which are planned for 22 May (legislative elections) and 31 July (presidential elections)—would be "a crucial step towards renewing the legitimacy of national institutions and reestablishing Palestinian national unity". Paulsen described how the spread of COVID-19 had worsened the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Counter-Terrorism

On 24 April, Council members agreed on a press statement condemning in the strongest terms the 21 April terrorist attack that took place in Quetta, Pakistan. On 20 April, the 1267/1989/2253 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee met in closed VTC format to receive the quarterly briefing from its Monitoring Team.

High-level Open VTC Debate on Protection of Critical Infrastructure

On 27 April, Council president Viet Nam convened an open debate via VTC on "Critical Infrastructure: The Protection of Objects Indispensable to the Survival of the Civilian Population" under the protection of civilians agenda item. Viet Nam's Foreign Minister, Bùi Thanh Sơn, chaired the meeting. The briefers were Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock, ICRC President Peter Maurer, and Chair of the International Peace Institute Board of Directors Kevin Rudd. Following the meeting, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2573. The resolution highlights the humanitarian impact of the destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population.

Peacekeeping

Expected Council Action

In May, China is organising an open debate on "Improving the Safety and Security of Peacekeepers" as a signature event of its presidency. Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support Atul Khare are expected to brief. A Council product, most likely a presidential statement, is anticipated.

Background and Key Recent Developments

During its last Council presidency in March 2020, China had scheduled an open debate on "UN Peacekeeping Operations: Better Capacity Building, More Safety and Security". According to the concept note China disseminated to Council members at the time, the debate was envisioned to address ways member states could help build capacity through training and provision of equipment and other resources; how the Security Council, the Secretariat, troop-contributing countries (TCCs) and police-contributing countries (PCCs), financial contributors, and host countries should respond to the challenges presented by complex situations and dangerous

environments; how the UN could improve its training system; and what uniform deployment standards for peacekeepers should be established. Because of measures put in place to address the escalating COVID-19 pandemic, however, Council members were unable to meet in person, and the debate was cancelled.

Despite the cancellation, China decided to proceed with a resolution that members were in the process of negotiating as the anticipated outcome of the signature event. On 30 March 2020, the Council adopted resolution 2518 on capacity-building and safety and security of peacekeepers. Resolution 2518 requested, amongst other things, that host states facilitate access and freedom of movement for UN peacekeepers and their equipment consistent with the mandate, including for casualty and medical evacuation. Given that peacekeepers are often deployed in deteriorating and complex political and security environments, the resolution highlighted the need for missions to remain agile and effective in implementing their mandates in order to enhance the safety and security of peacekeepers, including through the provision of adequate medical facilities and critical capabilities. The text referred to the need to augment

UN DOCUMENTS ON PEACEKEEPING [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2518](#) (30 March 2020) was on improving the safety and security of peacekeepers. [S/RES/2436](#) (21 September 2018) was on peacekeeping performance. [Security Council Meeting Record S/2020/911](#) (16 September 2020) was a letter from the president of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the permanent representatives of Council member states containing the record of the 14 September 2020 meeting on UN peacekeeping operations.

Peacekeeping

operational health support and requested the Secretariat to instruct all peacekeeping missions to systematically document violations of status of forces agreements. It further requested that member states hosting peacekeeping operations investigate and prosecute those responsible for attacks on UN personnel. Finally, resolution 2518 requested the Secretary-General to review and ensure uniformity of UN standards on training and performance as ways to improve the safety and security of peacekeepers.

On 14 September 2020, the Council held its annual open debate on peacekeeping in accordance with resolution 2378, which requested the Secretary-General to provide a comprehensive annual briefing on “reform of United Nations peacekeeping” every 12 months and to update the Council on the “continuous efforts made in filling the existing gaps in terms of force generation and capabilities”. During the meeting, Lacroix described the steps that the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) had undertaken to improve the safety and security of peacekeepers since the adoption of 2518, including by promulgating policies on casualty evacuation and by improving force protection, camp defence, and medical standards, training and care.

The issue of peacekeepers’ safety and security has gained further momentum over the past several weeks: on 26 March, Kenya and 12 other Council members (including China) co-hosted an Arria-formula meeting on “Protecting the Peacekeeper: Suppressing the Deployment of Improvised Explosive Devices against Peace Operations”, which focused on how improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are often used to inflict harm on civilians and humanitarian workers, as well as peacekeepers. The meeting also highlighted the use of IEDs in a number of countries where there are peace operations—including Somalia, Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo—that have seen a rise in injuries and fatalities of peacekeepers.

On 8 April, China announced that it was establishing a “Group of Friends on the Safety and Security of Peacekeepers” in conjunction with key troop contributors Brazil, India and Rwanda. It also extended invitations to all other member states to join the group. According to the concept note on the group’s establishment, this informal mechanism aims to provide a forum for discussing the difficulties peacekeepers face with regard to their safety and security; increasing awareness and information-sharing on this issue and proposing initiatives to address these concerns; enhancing coordination with the Secretariat on peacekeeper safety and security; and adopting common positions for collective action. At the time of writing, it was unclear when the group would be officially launched. On 13 April, the Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations, a subsidiary body of the Security Council currently chaired by Tunisia, met at the request of China to discuss implementation of resolution 2518 and discuss further the formation of the informal group of friends.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the safety and security of peacekeepers. When resolution 2518 was adopted, the COVID-19 pandemic was in its early stages, and its potential impact on peace operations remained an open question. During the final stages of negotiations, some Council members argued that language should be included to refer to the pandemic, as peacekeepers’ health is a key aspect of their safety and security, while other members felt that there should be no specific reference to COVID-19 given that threats such as Ebola have also had an impact on peacekeepers’ health. A general reference to “infectious diseases” was agreed upon.

Given that the impact of COVID-19 on peacekeepers’ safety continues to remain a point of concern for Council members, the Council and briefers may wish to focus on how peace operations are undertaking their mandated tasks in the context of COVID-19.

Council members may also wish to use the open debate to further expand on the discussions around the use of IEDs in settings where there are peace operations.

Another ongoing issue is the importance of equipping and training peacekeepers in a way that enhances not only their performance but also their safety and security. While negotiating a potential presidential statement, the Council may wish to both emphasise the link between capacity-building and the safety and security of peacekeepers and highlight the importance of contributions such as helicopters, medical support, rapid reaction forces, counter-IED technology, and other resources helping to promote peacekeeper safety and security.

Council Dynamics

There is a large degree of unity within the Council concerning the need to improve the safety and security of peacekeepers and the key role of training and capacity-building prior to and during their deployment. The unanimous adoption of resolution 2518 illustrates this.

There are, however, differing views within the Council and among the wider membership over how to assess and improve peacekeeping performance. Some members have prioritised increased accountability for under-performance. In contrast, others have felt that missions are too often tasked with difficult mandates that are formulated with limited input from TCCs. Some also believe that a spotlight is placed on troop under-performance, but less so on the performance of civilian mission leaders.

China’s focus on this issue is likely to reflect the fact that it is currently the ninth leading contributor of UN peacekeepers and the leading contributor of such personnel among permanent Council members.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In May, the Security Council will hold its monthly briefing on Yemen, followed by consultations. Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths and an OCHA representative will brief. General Abhijit Guha, who heads the UN Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), may brief during consultations. The mandate of UNMHA expires on 15 July 2021.

Key Recent Developments

Intensified diplomatic efforts continued during April in support of proposals for a nationwide ceasefire, the re-opening of the Sana'a airport and the free flow of fuel and other basic commodities through Hodeidah ports and along Yemen's main roads, and the resumption of peace talks. The Houthis rebel group, however, maintained its effort to take oil- and gas-rich Marib governorate, the Yemeni government's last stronghold in the north.

On 12 April, Germany hosted a virtual meeting of the 'P5 + 4'—comprising the Council's five permanent members plus Germany, Kuwait, Sweden and the EU—to discuss ways to support the UN Special Envoy's mediation. Griffiths and US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking were present in Germany, meeting with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas ahead of the high-level discussion.

The Yemeni government granted clearances to four fuel ships to enter Hodeidah in late March, allowing the first fuel deliveries into the Houthi-controlled port since January. The two-month disruption has been causing a fuel shortage in the north and driving up the price of basic commodities. According to the UN, the deliveries only represented two weeks' worth of fuel needs. The government provided clearances to three more fuel ships to enter Hodeidah on 13 April.

Briefing Council members on 15 April, Griffiths highlighted the new "diplomatic consensus" for ending fighting and restarting peace talks. He noted his visit to Berlin, as well as recent meetings in Muscat, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. Griffiths recognised Oman, Saudi Arabia and the US for closely coordinating their efforts in support of his proposal for a ceasefire, confidence-building measures, and the resumption of peace talks. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock highlighted the second wave of COVID-19 in Yemen, which he said had doubled the number of confirmed cases in the past two weeks, and the continued risk of large-scale famine amid "tens of thousands of people already starving to death". Lowcock again underlined the funding shortage facing aid efforts, which meant that relief agencies could only assist nine million people per month, compared to 14 million last year.

In a 16 April press statement, Council members welcomed Saudi and Omani diplomatic initiatives. They called on the Houthis to end their escalation in Marib and condemned the cross-border attacks against Saudi Arabia. Among other points, members called on the Yemeni government to facilitate regularly, without delay, the entry of fuel ships into Hodeidah port.

The COVID-19 outbreak in Yemen has recently led to the deaths of several high-level officials. That includes Sultan Saleh Aida Aida Zabin of the Houthis, whom the Council sanctioned in February

for his role as director of the Criminal Investigation Department in Sana'a in overseeing a policy of intimidation and the use of systematic arrest, detention, torture, sexual violence and rape of politically active women. The first delivery of about 360,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses arrived in Aden at the start of April, with another 1.6 million expected in the coming months, according to the UN.

According to media reports, Saudi Arabia and Iran held secret talks in Iraq on 9 April for the first time since severing relations in 2016. The talks reportedly focused on Yemen and the Iran nuclear deal, including the potential for Iran to use its influence on the Houthis to stop cross-border attacks into Saudi territory. It was reported that a second round of talks is being planned.

Key Issues and Options

Reaching agreement between the Houthis and the Yemeni government on proposals for a nationwide ceasefire, confidence-building measures to alleviate the humanitarian crisis, and the resumption of peace talks remains a key issue.

A related, critical issue is the battle in Marib governorate. If Marib City falls and the Houthis seize the governorate, the government's position would be significantly weakened in any future peace process.

The Council may adopt a resolution endorsing any ceasefire agreement that is reached. Alternatively, members could prepare to hold an emergency meeting on developments around Marib City if the situation appears to worsen, reiterating calls for a de-escalation and threatening sanctions on Houthi officials, military leaders and economic agents if they push forward with the attack.

The Marib fighting also threatens to worsen the humanitarian crisis, especially if it triggers mass displacement of civilians—more than a million internally displaced persons live in Marib, having already fled other parts of Yemen. Generating more humanitarian funding, alleviating the fuel crisis, and stabilising the Yemeni rial are important to mitigate the crisis and combat famine. Council members may repeat calls for donors to provide additional funding to the humanitarian response and to inject hard currency into Yemen's Central Bank to bolster the rial and for pressure to be maintained on the government to allow fuel deliveries.

Another significant issue remains the environmental and humanitarian threat posed by the moored FSO Safer oil tanker in the Red Sea, which the UN remains unable to access despite previous Houthi commitments to allow it to deploy a team to assess the ship and conduct emergency repairs.

Additionally, sustaining the Saudi Arabia-brokered Riyadh Agreement, the power-sharing accord between the Yemeni government and the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC), is important for resolving the Yemen conflict. A related issue is how to promote an inclusive political process that would involve Yemen's multiple armed groups and other stakeholders besides the Houthis and the government.

Members could consider a new resolution calling for a nationwide ceasefire and mandating greater inclusion of Yemeni stakeholders in political negotiations to update the binary negotiating framework

UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2534](#) (2020) decided to extend until 15 July 2021 the mandate of the United Nations Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), that is supporting the implementation of the Agreement on the City of Hodeidah and Ports of Hodeidah, Saif and Ras Issa. [S/RES/2216](#) (2015) demanded that all Yemeni parties, in particular the Houthis, to fully implement resolution 2201 (2015), and refrain from further unilateral actions that could undermine the political transition in Yemen. [Security Council Press Statement SC/14497](#) (16 April 2021) called on the Houthis to end their escalation in Marib and condemned the cross-border attacks against Saudi Arabia. [Security Council Meeting Record S/2021/372](#) (15 April 2021) was the monthly briefing where the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock and Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Martin Griffiths briefed the Council.

Yemen

between the Houthis and the government set out in resolution 2216 of 14 April 2015. Such a resolution could further define Council expectations regarding the behaviour of all parties to the conflict and threaten consequences for any party that violates such expectations.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for the Special Envoy and his mediation efforts. They further share concerns about the humanitarian situation and the threat posed by the decrepit Safer oil tanker. The new US administration has placed a focus on

ending Yemen's war, which has reinvigorated international diplomatic engagement in recent months. Since Lenderking was appointed US Special Envoy, he has worked closely with Griffiths. Russia often raises concerns about the Council's singling out the Houthis, which it believes could give the appearance of bias. That dynamic has played out during negotiations this year on several Council products.

The UK is the penholder on Yemen. Ambassador I. Rhonda King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) chairs the 2140 Sanctions Committee.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Expected Council Action

In May, the Council will hold its semi-annual debate on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The High Representative for BiH, Valentin Inzko, is expected to brief on the latest report of the Office of the High Representative (OHR).

The current authorisation for the EU-led multinational stabilisation force (EUFOR ALTHEA) expires on 5 November.

Key Recent Developments

Political instability continues in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and is interfering with progress on socioeconomic reforms and preventing effective coordination between state institutions on issues such as COVID-19 response and mass vaccinations.

On 23 December 2019, after a 14-month-long delay, the state parliament endorsed the new Council of Ministers after an agreement between the parties was reached through international facilitation. However, the predominantly Bosniak and Croat regional entity, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH)—one of the two entities that make up BiH along with the predominantly Serb Republika Srpska (RS)—remains without a government, as do two of the Federation's ten cantons. The FBiH entity remains under the rule of a caretaker government since the last general elections were held in October 2018. The ongoing deadlock reflects continued divisions and tensions among Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs.

Local elections were postponed for over a month last year due to the Central Election Committee (CEC) not receiving sufficient funding to conduct preparatory activities. The elections, which finally took place on 15 November, saw the ruling parties losing key strongholds in Sarajevo and Banja Luka, suggesting a possible shift on the BiH political scene. The divided Bosniak and Croat city of Mostar held its first local elections in 12 years after the EU, the US and UK brokered an agreement in June 2020 which broke the deadlock between two major Croat and Bosniak political parties: the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and the Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (SDA). The CEC announced that while HDZ and SDA had won the largest vote shares of the 35-member city council, they nevertheless fell short of outright majority. On 15 February, Mario Kordić, the HDZ candidate, was elected mayor by a majority vote in the city council.

Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik, the RS leader for a decade and now the Serbian member of the tripartite Bosnian presidency, continued speaking out against the country's statehood and threatening that the RS would secede. This destabilising rhetoric is regularly documented by the High Representative in his six-monthly reports. Furthermore, taking advantage of a controversial document allegedly sent by Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Jansa to European Council President Charles Michel, which suggested redrawing the borders of former Yugoslavia, Dodik has published recent videos on YouTube calling for a "peaceful break-up" of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, after the number of infections dropped in January, BiH saw a new peak in cases in February. Reporting a total of 198,461 cases and 8,551 deaths at the time of writing, BiH has ordered 2.1 million vaccines under the global COVAX mechanism and from the EU, but deliveries have been delayed, and the majority of vaccines procured thus far have been received as donations.

The Council held its previous semi-annual meeting on 5 November 2020, where Inzko noted that while the 1995 General Framework Agreement for Peace, also known as the Dayton Agreement, provided a "solid framework for future development of Bosnia and Herzegovina", the global community erred in trusting some politicians too early; they had "used our goodwill to reinvigorate nationalistic divisive policies". He also underscored that systemic discrimination is common against so-called "others"—citizens who do not declare themselves as members of any of the three constituent peoples (Serbs, Croats or Bosniaks). Addressing issues outlined in his report, Inzko emphasised the need for BiH to "dramatically" improve the rule of law, combat corruption and address its massive problem of "brain drain" as talented young people continue to leave the country.

More recently, on 1 April, in a letter to the tripartite presidency, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called on Bosnia to pursue limited changes to its constitution needed to reform the electoral system and protect the rights of all its citizens. Specifically, only constituent people of Bosnia may run for high office in elections. Minorities, who are associated with other ethnicities are not eligible to run to be presidency members. In the letter, Blinken emphasised

Bosnia and Herzegovina

that “limited constitutional change will be necessary to reform the electoral system consistent with the requirement of the European Union membership and the rulings of the European courts”. (In 2009 the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the country’s constitution discriminates against members of minority groups by preventing them from running for high government office, but thus far, no effort has been made to change the constitution accordingly.)

Key Issues and Options

Political gridlock, lack of respect for the rule of law and growing ethnic divisions in BiH remain key issues. Slow progress in advancing socioeconomic reforms linked to BiH’s EU integration and fulfilling the criteria and objectives for closing the OHR are recurring issues.

Given the current tensions in BiH over Dodik’s continued divisive rhetoric and the reports of a document allegedly calling for the dissolution of Bosnia, Council members may consider issuing a presidential statement endorsing the continued relevance of Dayton Agreement and noting the continued willingness of the international community and major donors to lend their support.

Council Dynamics

Overall, Council members have similar concerns about BiH’s divisive ethnic politics. Most members are also critical of the RS leaders’ rhetoric, which they view as challenging BiH’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia, however, tends to be supportive of the RS leadership’s positions and is often critical of the High Representative, contending that his reporting is not objective. During the last Council debate on 5 November, Russia observed that the Council could “as an alternative” examine a report prepared by Republika Srpska and once again called for the early closure of the OHR, noting that the role of the international community in BiH has changed drastically in recent years.

While the decision on 5 November 2020 to re-authorise EUFOR ALTHEA for one year was uncontroversial, there have been difficulties in the past, with Russia objecting to the inclusion of certain language in relation to the High Representative and reference to “Euro-Atlantic” integration. Divisions over this reference, as well as those related to a possible future accession to NATO, have been a factor in Council dynamics between the US and the Council’s European members on one side and Russia on the other in the past seven years.

Syria

Expected Council Action

In May, the Security Council expects to hold its monthly meetings on the political and humanitarian situations and the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Key Recent Developments

On 18 April, the speaker of Syria’s parliament announced that the country would hold presidential elections on 26 May. The election is being held in accordance with current Syrian law, which says that elections must take place at least 90 days before the end of the president’s seven-year term. The current constitution, adopted in 2012, permits a president to serve two seven-year terms. However, the constitution does not apply retroactively, thus allowing President Bashar al-Assad—who has led Syria since July 2000 but was elected in 2014 under the current constitution—to run for another term.

The elections are likely to be a source of tension amongst Council members. Several Council members—including France, the UK and US—have stressed that they will not recognise the results if the elections fail to conform with resolution 2254, which was unanimously adopted in 2015 and calls for “free and fair elections, pursuant to [a] new constitution, to be...administered under supervision of the UN”. Other members have argued that the elections must be held as they comply with current Syrian law, and that their organisation is an internal matter.

In this tense political context, Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen, speaking to the Council on 28 April, announced that he was still aiming to organise a sixth round of meetings of the Constitutional Committee as soon as “logistically possible”. The last round

of meetings of the committee was held in Geneva during the week of 25 January and failed to achieve any discernible progress. Since that time, Pedersen has been working closely, but separately, with the government and opposition representatives to set out a series of clear goals for the committee’s work as well as an agreed methodology and workplan. According to media reports, on 15 April he shared a confidential proposal spelling out his vision, and was expecting to receive feedback from the parties. Pedersen told the Council that he had received input from the Syrian opposition but had yet to hear back from the government on his proposals, noting that he would determine the timing of sixth round of meetings of the Constitutional Committee when he “ha[d] both responses in hand”.

On 12 April, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) published the second report of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). The IIT was established to identify perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in Syria following a June 2018 decision of the Conference of State Parties (CSP) to the Chemical Weapons Convention. It was formed after the Security Council failed to renew the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism, which the Council established through resolution 2235 of 7 August 2015 “to identify those responsible” for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The 12 April report focuses on the use of chlorine gas during an attack on Saraqib, Syria, on 4 February 2018. The IIT concluded that there are “reasonable grounds” to believe that a Syrian air force helicopter dropped at least one cylinder of chlorine in the area, affecting at least 12 individuals.

On 16 April, Russia organised an Arria-formula meeting on the “Protection of Developing Nations Against Political Pressure:

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA Security Council Resolution S/RES/2533 (11 July 2020) renewed the authorisation for cross-border humanitarian aid into Syria through one border crossing (Bab al-Hawa) for 12 months. **Secretary-General’s Report S/2021/390** (22 April 2021) was the regular 60-day report on the implementation of humanitarian resolutions by all parties to the conflict in Syria.

Syria

Upholding the Integrity of International Non-proliferation Regimes”. The meeting focused largely on the Syria chemical weapons file, including what the concept note prepared for the meeting called the “politicised nature of OPCW investigations”, specifically raising concern about the work of the IIT.

On 21 April, the OPCW CSP voted to suspend Syria’s rights and privileges within the organisation’s policy-making organs. The vote, which required a two-thirds majority to pass, saw 87 members voting in favour of the measure and 15 members voting against, with 34 members abstaining. On 22 April, OPCW Director-General Fernando Arias responded to the decision, saying that it “reiterated the international community’s ethical commitment to uphold the norm against these weapons”.

Syria’s economic downturn continues to exacerbate the fragile humanitarian situation in the country. According to the March 2021 World Food Programme (WFP) situation report, the value of the Syrian pound “spiraled” in early March, reaching a record low of 4,700 pounds to one US dollar, before stabilising at 3,700 pounds to one US dollar. This has led to steep rises in the prices of basic goods and food, thereby worsening Syrians’ food insecurity. According to the WFP’s report, the food security situation has “deteriorate[d] rapidly”, with data showing a 72 percent year-on-year increase in “rates of poor and borderline food consumption”. Meanwhile, there are ongoing reports of bread and fuel shortages in both government- and non-government-controlled areas.

According to the Secretary-General’s regular 60-day report on the humanitarian situation, published on 22 April, the issue of access remains paramount in the context of the deteriorating humanitarian situation. The report notes that “intensified cross-line and cross-border deliveries are essential to reach everyone in need”; it further urges the Council to find consensus on the matter, noting that a “failure to extend the UN cross-border authorization would not only disrupt life-saving aid to millions”, but would also disrupt the UN COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan in Syria’s north-west. According to UNICEF, 203,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have arrived in Damascus for further distribution, while another 53,000 have arrived in Syria’s north-west under the COVAX plan led in Syria by UNICEF and the World Health Organization.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 46th session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) adopted resolution 46/22 on 24 March by a vote of 27 in favour and six against (including Russia and China), with 14 abstentions (including India). The resolution said the ten-year conflict in Syria had been marked by consistent patterns of gross violations and abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law. It recalled the statements made by the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights that crimes

against humanity and war crimes are likely to have been committed in Syria and the recent conclusions of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria that violations and abuses have included acts that are likely to constitute crimes against humanity, war crimes and other international crimes, including genocide. The resolution extended the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria for one year.

Key Issues and Options

Syria’s political process—including a possible sixth round of meetings of the Syrian Constitutional Committee as well as the 26 May presidential elections—is likely to be a major focus in May. The Council remains deeply divided on the validity of the upcoming Syrian elections, and there are strong disagreements on the progress achieved by, and the future of, the Constitutional Committee. Despite this, Council members may wish to issue a press statement that expresses their support for the Constitutional Committee’s ongoing work while offering their continued, full endorsement of resolution 2254.

During its meeting on the use of chemical weapons, the Council is also likely to focus on the recent IIT report and decision by the CSP. Members may wish to invite Arias to discuss the report’s findings in a private meeting (as was done on 5 November 2019). Like consultations, a private meeting is closed to the public. Unlike consultations, however, a private meeting is considered a formal meeting of the Council, and persons other than Council members and Secretariat officials can participate.

Addressing the deteriorating humanitarian situation also remains a major issue for the Council. As the Council will possibly begin negotiations sometime in May on the renewal of resolution 2533, which authorises cross-border humanitarian deliveries and is due to expire on 11 July, Council members are likely to have paid careful attention to Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock’s 28 April briefing and the findings of the Secretary-General’s report on the implementation of relevant humanitarian resolutions.

Council Dynamics

The Council remains deeply divided on Syria, with little suggestion that members can overcome the multiple impasses that exist on the file. The recent IIT report and OPCW decision have furthered aggravated the already tense dynamics on the Syria chemical weapons file, while the announcement of presidential elections is likely to create further rifts amongst Council members. Finally, members may expect discord as discussions about the renewal of cross-border humanitarian access gather pace in the coming weeks because of the 11 July expiration of resolution 2533, authorising cross-border humanitarian deliveries.

Libya

Expected Council Action

In May, the Security Council is expected to receive briefings by the Special Envoy to Libya and head of the UN Support Mission for Libya (UNSMIL), Ján Kubiš, and the chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, Ambassador T.S. Tirumurti, the Permanent Representative of India. Two Secretary-General's reports are also due in May: on UNSMIL and on the implementation of resolution 2591. Additionally, ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda will deliver her semi-annual briefing on recent developments concerning cases in Libya.

The authorisation given through resolution 2526 (to inspect vessels believed to be in violation of the arms embargo) expires on 5 June, and the authorisation given through resolution 2491 (to inspect vessels suspected of being used for migrant smuggling or human trafficking) expires on 3 October. The mandate of UNSMIL expires on 15 September. Measures related to the illicit export of petroleum from Libya expire on 30 July 2022, and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee expires on 15 August 2022.

Key Recent Developments

A 14-month-long assault by the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF, also known as the Libyan National Army) under General Khalifa Haftar against Libya's capital, Tripoli, and the internationally recognised Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) based there was halted by armed groups supporting the GNA in June 2020. Both the LAAF and the GNA receive foreign military backing in violation of UN sanctions. Turkey's support for the GNA eventually turned the conflict in its favour.

On 23 October 2020, the 5+5 Joint Military Commission (5+5 JMC)—consisting of five representatives each from the LAAF and the GNA—signed a permanent ceasefire agreement. The 5+5 JMC also expressed its intention to set up a monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the agreement. On 16 April, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2570, approving UN support for the Libyan Ceasefire Monitoring Mechanism (LCMM).

Also on 16 April, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2571, renewing the measures related to the illicit export of petroleum from Libya until 30 July 2022 and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee until 15 August 2022.

The Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF)—consisting of 75 participants representing the main Libyan geographical, social and political constituencies—decided on a “political roadmap” on 15 November 2020. The roadmap calls for parliamentary and presidential elections to be held on 24 December 2021. Until then, an interim “Government of National Unity” (GNU) is in place, as elected by the LPDF in early February, with Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah as prime minister and Mohammad Younes Menfi as president of the Presidency Council. The cabinet passed a vote of confidence in the House of Representatives on 5 March, and the GNU was sworn in on 15 March. A planned cabinet meeting in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi had to be postponed when civilians and armed men

affiliated with the LAAF prevented an advance team for Prime Minister Dbeibah from leaving the airport following their arrival.

Migrants and refugees continue to use the Central Mediterranean route to try to reach Europe through Libya. According to the International Organization for Migration, 138 people died and 219 went missing between 1 January and mid-April. On 21 April, a rubber boat carrying 130 people sank off the coast of Libya. No survivors were reported.

On 29 April, Council members held an informal interactive dialogue on Libya with a focus on the issue of foreign fighters and mercenaries in the country. Kubiš and Raisedon Zenenga, the UNSMIL Coordinator, briefed.

According to the terms of the 23 October 2020 agreement, the ceasefire includes the departure of foreign fighters and mercenaries from all sovereign Libyan spaces (land, sea and air) within three months from that day. That deadline passed on 23 January, and foreign fighters and mercenaries continue to be present in Libya. The Panel of Experts assisting the Libya Sanctions Committee has reported the presence of foreign fighters from Chad, Sudan (some trained by the United Arab Emirates, reportedly the largest military backer of the LAAF), and Syria, as well as mercenaries employed by the Wagner Group, a Russian private military company. The Kremlin denies any connection to the company.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 46th session, the Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Libya on 16 March without a vote (A/HRC/46/102), following its consideration of the report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review on Libya (A/HRC/46/17). Out of 285 recommendations received, Libya supported 181 while 104 were noted. On 7 April, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) published its decision that Libya violated the human rights of Magdulein Abaida, an activist working on women's rights, by failing to investigate and prosecute her unlawful arrest and torture by a militia group affiliated with the government, the Martyrs of 17 February Brigade.

CEDAW issued its decision after considering a complaint by Abaida, who fled Libya in 2012 after being harassed, tortured and forced to close down her women's rights organisation, Hakki (“My Right”). Committee member Nahla Haidar said: “We invited Libya to respond to the complaint on four occasions from 2018 to 2020, and we regret that the state party did not respond to our requests”. This is the first case in which the CEDAW found a violation of the rights of a human rights defender.

Key Issues and Options

Council members are following closely the progress made towards the implementation of resolution 2570 and the preparations for the 24 December parliamentary and presidential elections. Non-compliance with the arms embargo by multiple international actors, including the presence of foreign fighters and mercenaries, is an ongoing issue for the Council. Following Kubiš' briefing, Council members could issue a press statement reinforcing these points.

UN DOCUMENTS ON LIBYA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2571 (16 April 2021) renewed the measures related to the illicit export from Libya of petroleum until 30 July 2022 and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee until 15 August 2022. S/RES/2570 (16 April 2021) approved the proposal for UNSMIL to support the Libyan Ceasefire Monitoring Mechanism. S/RES/2546 (2 October 2020) renewed for 12 months the authorisation for member states, acting nationally or through regional organisations, to inspect vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya that they have reasonable grounds to suspect are being used for migrant smuggling or human trafficking. S/RES/2542 (15 September 2020) extended UNSMIL's mandate until 15 September 2021; it was adopted with 13 votes in favour and two abstentions (China and Russia). S/RES/2526 (5 June 2020) renewed for 12 months the authorisation for member states, acting nationally or through regional organisations, to inspect vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya bound to or from the country that they have reasonable grounds to believe are violating the arms embargo. Security Council Letter S/2021/380 (16 April 2021) was the summary of the Informal Experts Group's 1 April meeting on Libya.

Libya

Council and Wider Dynamics

Resolution 2570 reiterates the Council's position that states withdraw "all foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya without delay", but a number of countries, including a permanent member of the Council, have failed to respect this so far. All foreign sponsors but Turkey deny their role in Libya.

Divisions remain between Council members on Libya. The chair of the Libya Sanctions Committee was last able to brief the Council in September. Since then, the committee has been unable to agree on the chair's statement to the Council. (Sanctions committee decisions

and statements require consensus.) Ahead of the bimonthly briefing on UNSMIL in November 2020, Russia raised an objection to an assessment by the Panel of Experts that a merchant vessel had potentially violated the arms embargo by carrying jet fuel from the UAE to Benghazi in September 2020; it raised the same objection again ahead of January's bimonthly briefing on UNSMIL. Similar dynamics played out ahead of the 24 March briefing.

The UK is the penholder on Libya. T.S. Tirumurti, India's Permanent Representative, chairs the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee.

Upholding Multilateralism and the UN-Centred International System

Expected Council Action

In May, the Security Council will hold a high-level briefing via videoconference on "Maintenance of international peace and security: Upholding multilateralism and the United Nations-centred international system". Wang Yi, China's state councillor and minister for foreign affairs, is expected to chair the meeting. Volkan Bozkir, the president of the General Assembly, is expected to brief.

Background

The briefing builds upon the open debate initiated by China during its November 2018 presidency on "Strengthening multilateralism and the role of the United Nations". At that meeting, Secretary-General António Guterres warned about the eroding effects of the decline in trust among nations while stressing that the "crises in Syria, in the Middle East peace process and elsewhere have shaken popular faith in the potential of the international community to deliver solutions". He added that to strengthen multilateralism, the international community must reinforce its commitment to the UN Charter, and UN bodies should seek further cooperation with regional organisations and civil society.

On 9 January 2020, Viet Nam convened an open debate on "Upholding the United Nations Charter". In a presidential statement adopted during that meeting, the Council "reaffirm[ed] its commitment to multilateralism and the central role of the United Nations" and "recognised the critical importance of the Charter to the maintenance of international peace and security and development of international law". The statement also underscored the role of regional and sub-regional organisations in maintaining international peace and security.

Transnational challenges such as terrorism, climate change, cyber threats, and pandemics (including COVID-19) continue to put a spotlight on the need for an effective multilateral system that draws strength from international solidarity and cooperation. In this regard, when the Council adopted resolution 2565 on access to COVID-19 vaccinations on 26 February, it called for "the strengthening of national and multilateral approaches and international cooperation...

in order to facilitate equitable and affordable access to COVID-19 vaccines in armed conflict situations, post-conflict situations and complex humanitarian emergencies".

On 21 September 2020, the world's heads of state and government issued a declaration to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the UN during the General Assembly's annual debate. In the declaration, adopted unanimously as General Assembly resolution 75/1, they emphasised that "our challenges are interconnected and can only be addressed through reinvigorated multilateralism". Reflecting on the effects of COVID-19, they added: "Multilateralism is not an option but a necessity as we build back better for a more equal, more resilient and more sustainable world". In the declaration, they expressed their determination to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to abide by international agreements, to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, and to uphold the rights of women and girls, among other measures.

Key Issues and Options

An overarching issue is how multilateral mechanisms can be used most effectively to address threats to international peace and security.

A related issue is how to promote solidarity and cooperation to resolve transnational threats such as terrorism, climate change, cyber threats, and transnational organised crime through collective action.

Council members could use the briefing as an opportunity to take stock of the state of multilateralism and explore options for enhancing cooperation on intractable issues on the Council's agenda.

In the future, the Council could also consider holding a private meeting with representatives of the General Assembly's "Special Committee on the Charter of the UN and the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization" to discuss the committee's activities and to consider potential ideas for strengthening the Council's work.

Council Dynamics

Council members are expected to reiterate their commitment to the UN Charter and multilateralism. They may underscore that issues such as climate change, the proliferation of weapons of mass

UN DOCUMENTS ON MULTILATERALISM [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2565](#) (26 February 2021) demanded humanitarian pauses to deliver vaccines and reiterated the Council's demand from resolution 2532 for a general and immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations on its agenda to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. [Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/1](#) (9 January 2020) was adopted during the ministerial-level debate on "Maintenance of international peace and security: upholding the UN Charter" during Viet Nam's Council presidency. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8699](#) (9 January 2020) was a ministerial-level open debate on "Maintenance of international peace and security: upholding the UN Charter" during Viet Nam's Council presidency. [S/PV.8395](#) (9 November 2018) was an open debate on the theme "Maintenance of international peace and security: strengthening multilateralism and the role of the United Nations" during China's Council presidency.

Upholding Multilateralism and the UN-Centred International System

destruction, mass migration, and the spread of diseases have consequences beyond the scope of one state and therefore can only be resolved by joint efforts. In the November 2018 debate, member states referred to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and UN peacekeeping as positive examples of multilateral cooperation. Such examples may be noted again in this month's briefing. In addition, Council members may emphasise the importance of international solidarity and cooperation in responding to the COVID-19 crisis.

Members may show a different understanding of the key characteristics of multilateralism and the UN Charter. Several members are likely to emphasise the importance of multilateralism and global cooperation in combating pandemics and climate change; however, some may underscore the importance of state sovereignty as a key principle of the international order enshrined in the Charter.

Conflict prevention, mediation and the relationship between the Council and regional and sub-regional organisations in addressing regional disputes are among other elements of the Charter that may be discussed in the meeting. Some members may encourage the use of these Chapter VI and VIII tools, rather than sanctions and other coercive measures outlined in Chapter VII of the Charter, which are often more controversial.

While strong divisions persist among the permanent members, some Council members believe that the current international environment might lend itself to enhancing multilateralism, as the new US administration has expressed a commitment to multilateral values that the previous administration did not. It remains to be seen whether and how this can be translated into progress on divisive issues on the Council's agenda.

Iraq

Expected Council Action

In May, the Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), which expires on 31 May. Special Representative and head of UNAMI Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert is also scheduled to brief the Council on recent developments in Iraq and on the two latest Secretary-General's reports, on UNAMI and on the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives. Both reports are due in May. The sixth report of the Special Adviser and head of the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) is also due in May.

UNITAD's mandate expires on 18 September 2021.

Key Recent Developments

On 31 March, the Council of Representatives—the Iraqi parliament—adopted the 2021 budget. An initial budget proposal, approved by the Iraqi cabinet, was sent to parliament in December 2020. Differences between the Iraqi federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) prolonged the adoption process. According to the 2021 budget, the KRG will receive 12.67 percent of the budget (based on population size) and will share 250,000 barrels of oil per day with the Iraqi federal government. For 2020, the Iraqi parliament had not been able to adopt a budget, instead passing an emergency spending law in mid-November 2020 to be able to borrow money internationally.

Parliamentary elections are scheduled for 10 October. During her 16 February briefing to the Council, Hennis-Plasschaert urged the Iraqi parliament to pass the Federal Supreme Court Law. On 18 March, the Council of Representatives amended the 2005 Supreme Court Law to include a regulation of the selection process,

enabling three vacant seats to be filled. Previously there was no mechanism in place to fill vacant positions. The Iraqi Supreme Court certifies election results.

In an 18 November 2020 letter to the Council, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein requested the Council to strengthen UNAMI's role with regard to the elections. In a 15 February letter, Hussein repeated the request and specifically asked for election observers.

Attacks continue to be directed against the US military and diplomatic presence and the US-led Global Coalition against Da'esh in Iraq. Although these attacks are usually not claimed by any group, the US in the past has attacked bases of Iran-backed militias operating in Iraq in retaliation. On 15 February, a rocket attack against Erbil airport, the capital of the Kurdistan region, resulted in one person killed and six others wounded, including a member of the US army. The US, on 25 February, attacked buildings in eastern Syria, stating in a 27 February letter to the Council that it was “a targeted military strike in eastern Syria against [...] a facility used by Iran-supported non-State militia groups that are responsible for recent attacks against United States personnel and are engaged in ongoing planning for future such attacks.” In a 12 March letter to the Council, Iran rejected the US allegations. Syria condemned the attack in a 27 February letter to the Council.

One of the Iran-backed militias that the US has accused of perpetrating attacks against its personnel in Iraq is Kata'ib Hezbollah, which the US has designated a terrorist organisation. Kata'ib Hezbollah is part of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), established in 2014 from different, mostly Iran-backed, Shi'a Muslim fighters to combat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). In July 2019, then-Prime Minister Adil Abd Al-Mahdi issued an executive order bringing the PMF under the exclusive control of the Iraqi state and ordering it to cut all links with political entities. The current

UN DOCUMENTS ON IRAQ Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2544 (18 September 2020) extended the mandate of UNITAD until 18 September 2021. S/RES/2522 (29 May 2020) extended the mandate of UNAMI until 31 May 2021. Security Council Letters S/2021/152 (18 February 2021) contained the briefing provided by Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert and the statements given by Council members during the 16 February 2021 open videoconference meeting on UNAMI. S/2021/135 (11 February 2021) was from the Permanent Representative of Iraq, containing an 11 February 2021 letter from the Iraqi foreign minister requesting the Council to strengthen UNAMI's role with regard to the upcoming elections, including by sending election observers. S/2020/1130 (20 November 2020) contained an 18 November 2020 letter from the Iraqi foreign minister requesting the Council to strengthen UNAMI's role with regard to the upcoming elections.

Iraq

Iraqi prime minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, is trying to implement a zero-tolerance policy towards armed groups operating outside state control.

The overall security situation in Iraq remains fragile. Rockets struck Baghdad airport on 22 April, targeting the area of the airport where coalition troops are stationed. On 15 April, a car bomb exploded at a market in Baghdad, killing four people and wounding 17. A drone attack targeted the Erbil airport on 14 April. The airport also houses coalition troops. On the same day, rockets were fired at a Turkish military base in Bashiqa province, in eastern Iraq, killing one Turkish soldier.

On 24 April, as a result of a fire that broke out at an intensive care unit for COVID-19 patients in a Baghdad hospital, at least 82 people died and more than 110 people were injured, according to Iraqi authorities.

UNITAD was established on 21 September 2017 by resolution 2379 to support Iraqi domestic efforts to hold ISIL accountable for crimes it committed in the country “by collecting, preserving, and storing evidence in Iraq of acts that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide”. Additionally, UNITAD is assigned to promote accountability globally for atrocity crimes committed by ISIL and to counter ISIL narratives that have led people to join the terrorist group. UNITAD’s investigations are focusing on those ISIL members who bear the greatest responsibility among the leadership as well as regional and mid-level commanders.

On 12 February, the conference of states parties to the International Criminal Court (ICC) elected the current Special Adviser and head of UNITAD, Karim Asad Ahmad Khan, as the new ICC prosecutor. He is expected to start his new position in mid-June.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 26 March, several special procedures of the Human Rights Council released a joint statement saying they were appalled by the 10 March killing of Jasib Hattab Abboud Al Heliji, the father of human rights defender Ali Jasib Hattab Al Heliji, who remains forcibly disappeared. The killers allegedly have links to the Popular Mobilization Units, part of the Iraqi Security Forces, the statement said. The statement also called for more to be done to establish the fate and whereabouts of Ali Al Heliji, who was abducted on 8 October 2019, shortly after reportedly being threatened by members of the Popular Mobilization Units for, among other things, his participation in a demonstration against unemployment, corruption and poor public services.

In a 21 April statement, the special rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, welcomed Iraq’s adoption of the Law on Yazidi [Female] Survivors on 1 March. The law recognises

crimes committed by ISIL against women and girls from the Yazidi, Turkman, Christian, and Shabak minorities – including kidnapping; sexual enslavement; and forced marriage, pregnancy and abortion – as genocide and crimes against humanity. It provides compensation for survivors and includes measures for their rehabilitation and reintegration into society and the prevention of such crimes in the future. However, the special rapporteur said more needs to be done for children born of rape during the conflict.

Key Issues and Options

An immediate issue for Council members in May will be the renewal of UNAMI’s mandate. In that context, Council members may discuss possible options regarding the request from the Iraqi government for a strengthened UN role in the electoral process.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members are generally unanimous in their support for UNAMI and the positive developments in Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations.

Regional dynamics continue to affect Iraq. The government routinely says that Iraq has no intention of taking sides and becoming caught in the middle of Iran-US tensions. Turkey continues to conduct military operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) positions in Kurdistan, in northern Iraq, despite Iraq’s objections.

Council members are generally supportive of UNITAD, as is the Iraqi government. Members whose national jurisdictions do not have the death penalty remain concerned that evidence shared by the investigative team with the Iraqi authorities might be used in criminal proceedings in which the death penalty could be imposed. Other members are of the opinion that the use of the death penalty is Iraq’s sovereign right, a point routinely emphasised by Iraq as well. Those members may accordingly refer to the fact that no evidence has been shared with Iraq yet.

Another issue frequently raised by some members is the prosecution of foreign terrorist fighters currently on Iraqi soil. Some of the governments concerned have been reluctant to take back their nationals in order to prosecute them, leading to criticism that they are outsourcing their legal obligations. Some members also continue to emphasise the need to include in the Iraqi national legal system the international crimes that UNITAD is mandated to investigate.

The US is the penholder on Iraq issues in general, and the UK is the penholder on Iraqi-Kuwaiti issues and UNITAD. Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia) is the chair of the 1518 Iraq Sanctions Committee.

Lebanon

Expected Council Action

In May, the Council is expected to receive the semi-annual briefing on the Secretary-General’s report on the implementation of resolution 1559, issued on 22 April. Adopted in 2004, resolution 1559 called for the disarmament of all militias and the extension of government control over all Lebanese territory. Under-Secretary-General

for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo is expected to brief the Council.

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

UN DOCUMENTS ON LEBANON Security Council Resolutions S/RES/1701 (11 August 2006) called for a cessation of hostilities between the militant group Hezbollah and Israel. S/RES/1559 (2 September 2004) called for the disarmament of all militias and the extension of government control over all Lebanese territory. **Secretary-General’s Report S/2021/396** (22 April 2021) was on the implementation of resolution 1559.

Lebanon

Key Recent Developments

The situation in Lebanon remains difficult as Lebanese leaders continue to disagree on the formation of a government and civilians bear the brunt of a worsening economic situation. Lebanon does not have a government, more than eight months after Prime Minister Hassan Diab resigned following widespread protests in the aftermath of the 4 August 2020 Beirut blast. Diab serves in a caretaker position while Saad Hariri—whom Lebanese President Michel Aoun designated as the new prime minister on 22 October 2020—negotiates the formation of a new cabinet. According to media reports, disagreements between Hariri and Aoun remain a stumbling block in the formation of a new government.

This political impasse hinders progress in addressing Lebanon's multifaceted economic problems, as there is no leadership in a position to carry out structural reforms or conduct talks with the International Monetary Fund aimed at unlocking approximately \$10 billion in loans. On 16 March, the Lebanese currency reached a record low of 16,000 Lebanese pounds to the dollar. This compounded the difficulties faced by the civilian population, which had already been struggling to obtain basic staples for the past several months. The dire economic situation prompted demonstrations in March in Beirut, Mount Lebanon, the Bekaa and in south Lebanon.

Lebanon's economic strife also continues to adversely affect the refugee population in the country, which totals approximately 870,000 people. According to the Secretary-General's latest report on the implementation of resolution 1559, nine out of ten Syrian refugees in Lebanon live in extreme poverty, leading to an increased risk of evictions, gender-based violence and child labour. Palestinian refugees similarly face difficulties as a lack of funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) led to a disruption in the provision of support and services. As a result, Palestinian refugees in several refugee camps across Lebanon, including in south Lebanon and Beirut, staged protests against UNRWA throughout February and March.

International interlocutors continue to call for the swift formation of a government. On 14 April, US Under Secretary of State David Hale said after a meeting with Lebanese leaders in Beirut that "America and the international community are ready to help, but we can do nothing meaningful without a Lebanese partner". He underscored the need for the Lebanese elites to resolve their differences and address the economic situation. In addition, European companies, including French and German firms, presented plans to restore the Beirut port but emphasised their inability to move forward with the plans until the political deadlock in Lebanon is resolved.

In recent months, there have been increased demands within Lebanon to address impunity in the country. Members of the Lebanese public and international interlocutors have called for the identification and prosecution of those responsible for the assassination of Lokman Slim, a Lebanese activist and an outspoken critic of Hezbollah, who was found dead on 4 February in the village of Addoussieh in southern Lebanon. In a 22 March statement, three Special Rapporteurs of the Human Rights Council urged the government to implement measures to ensure the independence and impartiality of the investigation into Slim's death. They further suggested that the Lebanese government consider asking for international technical assistance in the investigation.

There have also been delays in the investigation of the Beirut

port blast. On 10 December 2020, Lebanese judge Fadi Sawan announced his intention to question as suspects several Lebanese officials, including caretaker Prime Minister Diab and former Minister of Finance Ali Hassan Khalil. On 18 February, the Lebanese Court of Cassation dismissed judge Sawan from the investigation, apparently at the request of political figures such as Khalil. This has prompted a public outcry, including protests by those affected by the Beirut explosion, including families of victims, against what they perceive as political interference in the investigation and a lack of accountability. In a 13 March statement, the International Support Group for Lebanon—which is comprised of the UN, China, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, the UK, and the US, as well as the EU and the Arab League—called for a swift, transparent and credible investigation of the Beirut port blast and Slim's assassination.

Key Issues and Options

A growing concern for the Council is how to address the political and economic instability in Lebanon and prevent further deterioration of the already fragile security situation in the country.

One of the long-standing issues for the Council is the significant amount of weaponry held by Hezbollah and other non-state actors in contravention of resolutions 1559 and 1701. In his most recent report on the implementation of resolution 1559, the Secretary-General said that the "self-acknowledged maintenance of arms by Hizbullah [sic] and other groups and the alleged increase by Hizbullah of its arsenal pose a serious challenge to the State's ability to exercise full sovereignty and authority over its territory". He further noted that during the most recent reporting period, protests by the civilian population included calls for the disarmament of militias in the country.

Another issue of increasing concern relates to the ability of the security forces in Lebanon to maintain security in the country. The Secretary-General warned in his report that the dire economic situation faced by civilians and the budgetary pressures on the Lebanese Armed Forces and other security forces may adversely affect the latter's ability to preserve stability.

Among the options that the Council could consider are:

- calling for international partners to increase humanitarian support to Lebanon and to consider deepening cooperation with security agencies such as the Lebanese Armed Forces;
- requesting a briefing from UNHCR to discuss possible means to address the difficult situation of the refugee population in Lebanon; and
- issuing a presidential or a press statement to call for the urgent formation of a new government in Lebanon and the swift implementation of reforms necessary to avert a humanitarian crisis.

With regard to the last option, it should be noted that the Council has not issued a press statement on Lebanon since February 2019.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity and security. While most Council members are concerned about the maintenance of arms outside the control of the Lebanese state, there is a difference in perspective on Hezbollah, the most heavily armed militia in the country.

The US is an advocate for stronger action by the UN to enforce the arms embargo on Lebanon to prevent the build-up of arms

Lebanon

by Hezbollah. However, Russia believes that Hezbollah should be viewed as a legitimate partner for dialogue as it is part of the Lebanese government. According to media reports, a delegation of senior Hezbollah members met with Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on 15 March in Moscow.

It appears that during the Council's latest closed consultations on the implementation of resolution 1701, which took place on 18 March, some of the Council's European members stressed the need to address impunity in Lebanon and facilitate accountability for the Beirut port explosion and the killing of Lokman Slim.

Sudan/South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In May, the Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). The Council is also expected to extend the mission's support for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM), established in 2011 to conduct monitoring and verification activities along the Sudan/South Sudan border.

The mandate of UNISFA and the mission's support for the JBVMM expire on 15 May.

Key Recent Developments

Despite the continued rapprochement between Sudan and South Sudan, little progress has been made in resolving the final status of Abyei, the disputed area along the Sudan-South Sudan border. According to the most recent report of the Secretary-General, the security situation "has been relatively calm, yet tense and unpredictable", and significant humanitarian challenges remain. It also said that no progress has been made regarding the operationalisation of the Athony airstrip, the deployment of a civilian deputy head of mission (as requested by the Council in May 2019), and the issuance of outstanding visas for the authorised three formed police units and 148 individual police officers. The mission's current troop deployment is 131 below the ceiling of 3,550 authorised in resolution 2550. The police component stands at 47 officers against an authorised total of 640 police personnel, with the low rate of deployment attributable to the government of Sudan's failure to issue visas.

On 12 November 2020, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2550, renewing the mandate of UNISFA and the mission's support for the JBVMM until 15 May. The resolution contained new language in relation to an exit strategy for UNISFA. It also requested the Secretary-General to develop options for the responsible drawdown and exit of the mission and to submit a report on these by 31 March. In a letter to the Council on 1 April, the Secretary-General reported that consultations conducted with the governments of Sudan, South Sudan and Ethiopia as well as other relevant stakeholders were "inconclusive" and, given the different positions on the future of the mission, "no options that would be minimally acceptable to the parties could be formulated".

According to the letter, Sudan "indicated that a responsible drawdown of UNISFA could be considered immediately but should proceed gradually over a one-year period" to allow for the establishment of the mechanisms provided for in the Agreement on the Temporary

Arrangements for the Administration and Security of the Abyei Area (agreed to by the parties in June 2011). Sudan also said that if tensions remain high with Ethiopia because of the dispute over the al-Fashaga area and negotiations on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, it will "consider requesting Ethiopia to withdraw as a troop-contributing country from UNISFA and be replaced with a multinational African force".

South Sudan emphasised that security concerns justified the continued presence of UNISFA and expressed the view that the mission's exit should be envisaged only after the resolution of the final status of Abyei. However, it rejected the establishment of joint institutions with Sudan. South Sudan also called for the appointment of a civilian deputy head of mission. Ethiopia indicated "that a reduction in the troop level of UNISFA, combined with a lack of cooperation by the Sudan, would prevent UNISFA from fully implementing its mandate" and that any reduction "would put the remaining troops of UNISFA at risk and lead Ethiopia to withdraw them from the operation".

The Council was last briefed on Abyei on 26 April by Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Parfait Onanga-Anyanga.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council to consider leading up to UNISFA's renewal is what modifications to make to the mandate and force structure in light of the situation on the ground. Council members are expected to take into account the findings and recommendations of the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the mandate of UNISFA. The report does not, however, make any recommendations on the future of the mission (previous reports recommended extending the mandate of the mission for six months). It is likely that the visa issuance problems and the protracted difficulties with appointing a civilian deputy head of mission, among other issues, will be part of the discussion during negotiations ahead of UNISFA's mandate renewal.

Another key issue is what steps to take in relation to the drawdown and exit of the mission, as referred to in resolution 2550. A related issue is how to bridge the differences expressed by Sudan, South Sudan and Ethiopia as outlined in the Secretary-General's 1 April letter so that the Secretary-General can offer options that would be acceptable to all parties. One option would be to consider holding an Informal Interactive Dialogue with all the parties (Sudan,

UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN/SOUTH SUDAN [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2550](#) (12 November 2020) renewed the mandate of UNISFA until 15 May 2021. [Secretary-General's Report S/2021/383](#) (20 April 2021) was the Secretary-General's report on UNISFA. [Security Council Meeting Records S/2021/408](#) (26 April 2021) was a briefing on Sudan/South Sudan. [S/PV.8774](#) (12 November 2020) was the adoption of resolution 2550. [Security Council Letter S/2021/322](#) (1 April 2021) was a letter from the Secretary-General on options for the responsible drawdown and exit of UNISFA.

Sudan/South Sudan

South Sudan, Ethiopia, UN, AU, and IGAD) in order to find common ground. A related option may be for the Council to suggest that the Secretariat consult further with the AU and the AU High-Level Implementation Panel on a way forward. Another option is to consider requesting an independent review of UNISFA, an intention expressed in resolution 2550.

Council Dynamics

The US, as penholder on the issue, suggested language about considering an exit strategy for UNISFA during negotiations in November 2020, which was included in resolution 2550 (for more, see our What's In Blue story of 11 November 2020). In its explanation of vote following the resolution's adoption on 12 November 2020, the US said that "given the warming relations between the Sudan and South Sudan, a responsible exit strategy should be developed, and it must account for the continued security needs of the people of Abyei". The US also urged the AU to "play a key role" in this regard and to support the parties to achieve further political progress. The

US has repeatedly asserted that UNISFA has continued longer than intended for an interim force and has pressed for a viable exit strategy for the mission. The US position may have shifted slightly in recent months. At the 26 April meeting, the US expressed concern over the recent deterioration of the security situation within and among regional countries and the impact this may have on Abyei.

In the past, the three African members, supported by China and to a lesser extent by some other members, have called for a renewal of the mandate without any changes, given the evolving internal political situations in Sudan and South Sudan.

At the 26 April meeting, the three African members and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines made a joint statement emphasising that the mission constitutes "an anchor of stability" and that any future decision on drawdown options for UNISFA should be informed by the views of the parties and be conditions-based, including on the determination of the final status of Abyei.

The US is the penholder on Abyei.

Somalia

Expected Council Action

In May, the Council is scheduled to be briefed on the Secretary-General's report on the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), which is due 14 May. James Swan, Special Representative for Somalia and head of UNSOM, as well as Francisco Madeira, head of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) are expected to brief.

The mandate for UNSOM expires on 31 August. The mandate of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was reauthorised on 12 March for ten months until 31 December.

Key Recent Developments

The May briefing follows major political developments. According to an agreement reached on 17 September 2020 between the Federal Government led by President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmajo" and Somalia's federal member states, the country should have held legislative and presidential elections by December 2020 and February 2021, respectively. As logistical and security challenges prohibit the safe organisation and holding of direct one-person, one-vote elections, an indirect election—whereby clan representatives elect members of the House of the People, the lower house of Somalia's parliament, which in turn elects the president—was envisaged instead. Somalia has undergone similar indirect electoral processes in the past; it has not held direct elections since 1969.

Disagreements between the Federal Government and its member states, in particular Jubaland and Puntland, over organisational matters, and accusations that the Federal Government intended to influence the outcome, caused a delay in electoral preparations. Amidst the political impasse, the Federal Government expressed its resolve to move ahead with organising elections in Somalia's federal

member states of Galmudug, Hirshabelle and South West State and in Mogadishu Municipality. However, on 12 April, the House of the People, decided to extend the mandate of the president and the parliament for another two years. Farmajo signed this decision into law on the following day, thus overriding the 17 September Agreement on the modalities for conducting elections in Somalia. Farmajo, whose constitutional term officially ended on 8 February, justified the extensions by citing the need to prepare the country for one-person, one-vote elections instead of the immediate indirect elections, as stipulated by the 17 September Agreement. The Somali Senate criticised the move amid concerns over the constitutionality of the term extensions.

International criticism was also swiftly registered. In a press statement issued on 14 April, AMISOM, the EU, IGAD, the UN and several member states (among them Council members France, Ireland, Norway, the UK, and the US) emphasised that any "parallel political process, partial elections, or new initiatives leading to an extension of prior mandates will not be supported" and called on all parties to "exercise maximum restraint, continue dialogue, and avoid unilateral actions that may cause tensions".

Against this backdrop, the UK, the penholder on Somalia, invited Council members, the Somali federal government, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the AU, and the EU to an informal interactive dialogue on 21 April to discuss the unfolding developments in the country. The AU and IGAD did not attend the meeting. Council members reiterated the need for a political solution based on consensus, warning that the tense situation could provide further impetus to the armed group Al-Shabaab and expressing alarm about the humanitarian and security situations in

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOMALIA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2568 (12 March 2021) renewed the AMISOM authorisation until 31 December 2021. S/RES/2551 (12 November 2020) renewed the partial lifting of the arms embargo on Somali security forces, the authorisation for maritime interdiction to enforce the embargo on illicit arms imports and charcoal exports, and humanitarian exemptions to the regime. The resolution also renewed the mandate of the Somalia Panel of Experts until 15 December 2021. **Secretary-General's Reports** S/2021/154 (17 February 2021) is the Secretary-General's latest report on Somalia. **Security Council Meeting Records** S/PV.8775 (12 November 2020) covered the adoption of resolution 2551 (2020), including several explanations after the vote. China and Russia abstained from this resolution renewing elements of the Somalia sanctions regime.

Somalia

the country. While there appeared to be consensus on the need for dialogue between all political actors, not all Council members referenced the 17 September Agreement in their interventions.

Prior to the informal interactive dialogue, President Farmajo undertook a one-day visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo to meet with President Félix Tshisekedi. Farmajo asked Tshisekedi in his capacity as the AU chairperson to mediate and facilitate dialogue among Somalia's key political stakeholders. The AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), which convened on 22 April to discuss the situation in Somalia, confirmed its intention to assist in overcoming the political impasse. In the communiqué adopted following its meeting, the PSC condemned the term extensions, reaffirmed the inviolability of the 17 September agreement, affirmed the readiness of the AU to support dialogue, requested the Chairperson of the AU Commission to appoint a Special Envoy for Somalia, and called upon the Somali stakeholders to negotiate in good faith in search of an agreement to resolve the prevailing political impasse.

On 23 April, Council members issued a press statement expressing concern over the latest developments in Somalia. The statement stressed that the ongoing disagreement over the electoral model jeopardises progress towards democratisation, political reforms, security provision, and economic development. It further maintained that the impasse diverts attention from other pressing issues the country is facing, including terrorism and the COVID-19 pandemic. The statement also underscored the need for consensus to agree on an electoral model, while noting that the 17 September Agreement remained the only framework thus far endorsed by the federal government and its member states.

Pressure on Farmajo to reverse the decision continued to intensify. On 25 April, factions supporting Farmajo's stance and opposition forces clashed in Mogadishu, causing between 60,000 and 100,000 persons to flee their homes, according to the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia. On 27 April, the federal member states Galmudug, HirShabelle and Southwest State announced that they rejected the delay in elections and called for a return to the 17 September Agreement. On the same day, the Prime Minister, Mohamed Hussein Roble, welcomed the announcements and stated his readiness to implement the 17 September Agreement.

On 27 April, Farmajo announced that he would return to the provisions of the 17 September Agreement. At the time of writing, the implications of this decision for his time in office remained unclear.

Alongside this political turmoil, Somalia continues to grapple with a volatile security situation, mainly due to the activities of Al-Shabaab. On 9 March, the group claimed responsibility for six mortar rounds that landed in the Aden Adde International Airport Area, where much of the UN and international community is located. A car laden with explosives detonated near a restaurant in Mogadishu, the capital, on 5 March, killing some 21 persons and wounding over 30, according to media reports. Earlier that day, at least seven people

were reportedly killed in an attack on a prison in Bosaso, Puntland.

In addition to the volatile security situation, the humanitarian situation also remains a matter of concern, as Somalia is facing several threats at once, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, weather and climate shocks (including drought and flooding), and locust swarms that threaten crops and livestock feeding grounds. The Humanitarian Response Plan for Somalia estimates the total number of persons requiring assistance in 2021 at 5.9 million.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is the delay in the elections and the status of the term extensions in the aftermath of Farmajo's decision to recommit to the 17 September Agreement. Members may consider how to promote reconciliation efforts between the Federal Government and its member states and how to encourage dialogue based on the 17 September Agreement. They may further encourage the AU's engagement with Somali stakeholders, in light of its decision to appoint a Special Envoy. At a future date, one option would be to hold an informal interactive dialogue with the Special Envoy, after he or she has an opportunity to interact with the parties.

Another key issue is whether and how the political turmoil in Somalia is affecting the operations of UNSOM and AMISOM. Council members may want to hear from Swan how the UN is engaging with the Federal Government and member states to fully return to and implement the 17 September Agreement, and how to pave the way for elections. With regard to the mandate of AMISOM—which was reauthorised by the Council in March—members may be interested in whether the political situation in Somalia could affect the timing of the AU assessment of AMISOM, which is currently planned for May, or the conclusion of the review of the mission's concept of operations. AMISOM's mandate has a timeframe attached to both.

Council and Wider Dynamics

While unanimous in their concern over the deepening of rifts between the Federal Government and its member states, Council members differ regarding the extent to which the international community should be involved. Some perceived the decision to postpone elections and move away from an indirect electoral model as Somalia's internal matter, while others saw a clear need for the international community to be engaged and for a return to the provisions of the 17 September Agreement. These divisions may also be reflected in discussions concerning the term extensions. Since the AU intends to appoint a special envoy for Somalia, some Council members may favour supporting actions at the regional level, whereas others may wish to explore options for greater engagement by the UN and the Council. Somalia has in a statement criticised Djibouti and Council member Kenya, accusing both of attempting to influence the outcome of the 22 April PSC meeting.

Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force

Expected Council Action

In May, the Council is expected to hold a briefing on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (FC-G5S), formed in 2017 by Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger (G5 Sahel) to combat terrorist and criminal groups in the region.

Key Recent Developments

The security situation in the Sahel continued to deteriorate. Fighting in Chad between government forces and rebels invading from Libya resulted in the death of President Idriss Déby on 19 April, leading to concerns about the stability of the country, which has been critical to international efforts to combat terrorist groups in the Sahel. Meanwhile, Niger has suffered a surge of attacks against civilians since January.

Chad held presidential elections on 11 April, in which Déby appeared to have won a sixth term. That same day, a rebel group, the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), attacked from Libya, seeking to advance on Chad's capital, N'Djamena. The group, led by Mahamat Mahdi Ali and made up of mostly ethnic Gorane people, has been fighting in Libya's war since 2016.

On 20 April, the government announced that Déby had died from wounds sustained while on the frontlines about 300 kilometres north of N'Djamena. The army said a transitional military council led by Déby's 37-year-old son, General Mahamat Idriss Déby, would take power for 18 months until elections could be held. Opposition parties decried the creation of the council as a "coup d'état" since it did not follow constitutional rules for succession, under which the Speaker of the National Assembly becomes interim president. At least two people were killed and 27 injured during demonstrations on 26 April by protestors demanding civilian rule. That same day, the military appointed a civilian politician, Albert Pahimi Padacké, as transitional prime minister.

The AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) met on 22 April on Chad and, among other things, recalled the relevant provisions of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and the Lomé Declaration, urging a swift, peaceful, constitutional and smooth transition. In this regard, the AUPSC decided to dispatch a fact-finding mission to N'Djamena "to support the investigation into the killing of the late President and ascertain the efforts to restore constitutionalism". On 29 April, Security Council members held an informal interactive dialogue on foreign fighters and mercenaries in Libya that included discussion on the situation in Chad, with the permanent representative of Chad participating and updating members on developments.

In Niger, suspected Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) militants raided the ethnic Zarma villages of Tchamo-Bangou and Zaroumdareye in the Tillabéri region near Mali on 2 January, killing over 100 civilians and wounding at least 26. The attack was reportedly in retaliation for the killing of several ethnic Fulani civilians or ISGS members in the same villages. OCHA said that the 6 January attack displaced about 10,600 people. In a spate of deadly attacks in the second half of March, assailants killed at least 58 civilians on 15 March in Banibangou in Tillabéri, and at least 137 civilians were killed in an assault on a series of villages on 21 March in the Tahou region.

Niger held the second round of its presidential election on 21 February. Ruling party candidate Mohamed Bazoum won, and on 2 April, Niger recorded its first peaceful transfer of power between two elected governments. Days earlier, presidential guards thwarted an attempted coup d'état when a military unit reportedly assaulted the presidential palace on the night of 30-31 March.

Ten UN peacekeepers and one UN contractor were killed in Mali between January and April. On 13 April, the leader of the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), Sidi Brahim Ould Sidati, was killed in Bamako by unidentified individuals, triggering concerns about the impact of his death on implementing the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement between the government and northern armed groups. On 15 April, Mali's transitional authorities announced that presidential and legislative elections would be held on 27 February 2022, with a possible second round in March. The schedule complies with the timetable brokered last year by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for restoring constitutional order.

More than one million people remain displaced and 3.5 million require assistance in Burkina Faso because of violence by terrorist groups. UN officials warned Council members at briefings on conflict-induced hunger in November 2020 and in March about pockets of famine in Burkina Faso. According to media reports, talks between the government and terrorist groups in some parts of the country may be responsible for a decrease in violence and fewer civilian deaths over recent months. Burkina Faso held its presidential election on 22 November 2020, with voters re-electing President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré.

On 15 and 16 February 2021, a summit of the G5 Sahel was held in N'Djamena. At the meeting, President Déby announced the immediate deployment of 1,200 Chadian troops to the tri-border area in Niger with Burkina Faso and Mali. There had been speculation that France might announce troop reductions in Operation Barkhane, its 5,100-strong counter-terrorism force in the Sahel. However, French President Emmanuel Macron, who participated in the summit virtually, announced that France would not downsize until at least mid-2022. He also called for a "civilian surge" to complement military efforts and expressed continued opposition to dialogue with jihadist leaders.

At the Council's 6 April briefing on Mali, Niger announced on behalf of the three African Council members and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (A3 plus one) that they would propose a draft resolution in June to establish a UN office to support the FC-G5S. The Secretary-General has long recommended that the Council authorise a UN office to provide a logistical support package to the FC-G5S, similar to the one for the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Niger also said that the A3 plus one would request the Secretary-General to provide more information by the end of May on the modalities and needs for setting up a support office.

Key Issues and Options

Taking stock of progress and challenges in making the FC-G5S fully operational remains a key issue for the Council, which is addressed by these briefings on the joint force. The Secretary-General's report on the FC-G5S last year described an increase in

Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force

its “operational tempo”; it seems that his upcoming report will say that this has been sustained.

In this regard, a critical issue remains how to increase international support for the FC-G5S. The results of an assessment of MINUSMA’s support for the joint force, which includes the provision of life consumables and some logistical assistance, is expected to be included in the Secretary-General’s upcoming report on the FC-G5S. The Secretary-General continues to recommend that to have sustainable and predictable funding for the FC-G5S, the Council should authorise a UN logistical support package under a Chapter VII mandate, funded at least partially by UN assessed contributions.

Ways to support the FC-G5S may be considered when members discuss how to improve MINUSMA’s role during the mission’s June mandate renewal, and options to enhance bilateral assistance, along with commencing negotiations on a draft resolution to establish a UN support office.

The FC-G5S’ compliance with international humanitarian law and the UN human rights due diligence policy, which is necessary for MINUSMA support, is another key issue. Abuses or violations of international humanitarian law by other national and international forces in the Sahel are a related issue. At the briefing, members may emphasise the need for security forces to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law.

Complementing security measures by strengthening efforts to address structural causes of instability in the Sahel—such as underdevelopment, poor governance and climate change—through the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) and the G5 Sahel Priority Investment Programme is also an important issue. In January, the Secretary-General appointed Abdoulaye Mar Dieye of Senegal as Special Coordinator for development in the Sahel to boost

implementation of the UNISS. An option is to invite Dieye to brief at the upcoming Council session on the joint force.

The unfolding situation in Chad and how this could affect its military commitments in the region and the security situation in the Sahel is another critical issue. Chad’s military is considered the most effective among Sahel countries, deploying forces to Mali as part of MINUSMA, to Nigeria and Niger at times to fight the terrorist group Boko Haram, and most recently to the FC-G5S to reinforce its central zone of operations.

Council Dynamics

Council members consider the FC-G5S an important component in a comprehensive approach to stabilising the Sahel, which also includes support for strengthening state institutions and development. Led by Niger, the A3 plus one are expected to make a strong push to authorise a UN logistical support package. The Council, though, has been divided over the idea. For this reason, it has put on hold since 2018 its consideration of the Secretary-General’s proposal for a support package. The US, supported by the UK, has long objected to using UN assessed contributions for non-UN missions. It previously agreed to a UN support package for AMISOM on an “exceptional basis”. The US instead prefers to assist the FC-G5S bilaterally.

Several Council members contribute to other security initiatives in the region, including MINUSMA, Operation Barkhane and Takuba Task Force—made up of European special forces deployed to Central Mali—as well as to EU training and capacity-building missions and regional development initiatives.

France has served as the penholder on the FC-G5S, while the A3 plus one appear poised to lead negotiations on a new draft resolution.

Peace and Security in Africa

Expected Council Action

In May, the Security Council will hold a high-level open debate on “Addressing the root causes of conflict while promoting post-pandemic recovery in Africa”. State Councillor and Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi will chair the open debate, which is one of China’s signature events during its May presidency of the Security Council. Secretary-General António Guterres, Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Achim Steiner and a representative of the AU are the expected briefers. A presidential statement may be adopted in connection with the meeting.

Key Recent Developments

The initial health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa were not as great as first feared. As of 22 April, COVID-19 had infected 4.4 million and caused 118,849 deaths in Africa, according to the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). However,

Africa has been greatly affected by the secondary socioeconomic effects of the health crisis, which are frequent root causes of conflict.

According to the World Bank, the pandemic was projected to cause the first recession of sub-Saharan Africa in 25 years and push up to 40 million people in the region into extreme poverty. Supply chain disruptions and declining incomes contributed to increasing food insecurity, and government capacities to deliver services have been further stressed by declining revenues and increased debt burdens. Conflict-affected and fragile African states have been even more vulnerable to the shocks triggered by the pandemic. Moreover, as the UN has reported, terrorist and armed groups in Africa have sought to exploit the pandemic, and electoral processes faced heightened political tensions related to the health crisis.

While so far less deadly than in other parts of the world, a second wave of the pandemic has been sweeping through African countries since late 2020. There have also been a number of high-profile

UN DOCUMENTS ON COVID-19 [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2565](#) (26 February 2021) demanded humanitarian pauses to deliver vaccines and reiterated resolution 2532’s demand for a general and immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations on the Council’s agenda to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. [S/RES/2532](#) (1 July 2020) demanded a general and immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations on the Council’s agenda and called upon all parties to armed conflicts to engage immediately in a 90-day humanitarian pause. [Security Council Letters S/2021/157](#) (19 February 2021) contained the record of briefings and statements from Council members’ 17 February videoconference debate on equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. [S/2021/90](#) (27 January 2021) contained the record of briefings and statements from Council members’ 25 January videoconference briefing on the implementation of resolution 2532 demanding a ceasefire in Council agenda situations.

Peace and Security in Africa

deaths allegedly from Covid-19: Burundi's President Pierre Nkurunziza in June 2020 and President John Magufuli of Tanzania in March 2021 are suspected of having died from the disease. Other prominent African officials who have died from COVID-19 include Eswatini Prime Minister Ambrose Dlamini, Malian opposition leader Soumaila Cissé and former AU High Representative to Mali and the Sahel Pierre Buyoya, among others.

By the end of last year, the introduction of several vaccines was a major step toward bringing the pandemic under control. On 17 February, Security Council members held a ministerial-level open debate via videoconference on “ensuring the equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines in contexts affected by conflict and insecurity”. Concerns were reiterated at the debate about unequal access to the vaccine between rich and developing countries. Secretary-General Guterres described the initial rollout of the vaccine as “wildly uneven and unfair”, observing that ten countries had administered 75 percent of all COVID vaccines while more than 130 countries had not yet received a single dose.

Nine days later, on 26 February, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2565, demanding a humanitarian pause to facilitate the delivery of COVID-19 vaccines in areas of armed conflict. Resolution 2565 called for the strengthening of national and multilateral approaches and international cooperation, such as the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility, to facilitate equitable and affordable access to the vaccine in armed conflict situations, post-conflict situations and humanitarian emergencies. It further stressed that equitable access to safe, efficacious and affordable COVID-19 vaccines is essential to end the pandemic and expressed concern about uneven progress in vaccine access, recognising that those affected by conflict and insecurity are particularly at risk of being left behind.

The COVAX Facility—administered by the WHO, the Gavi vaccine alliance, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, and UNICEF—is the main multilateral mechanism to facilitate distribution of vaccines to poorer countries. It aims to support 92 low- and middle-income countries, including supplying 600 million doses to Africa. Deliveries of COVAX vaccines worldwide started in February. But by 8 April, Africa had only administered two percent of the 690 million vaccine doses administered globally, according to the WHO. Within Africa, ten countries make up 93 percent of administered doses.

The emergence of COVID-19 variants that could eventually prove resistant to vaccines has added urgency to vaccination campaigns. A more infectious coronavirus variant discovered in South Africa is thought to be fuelling much of Africa's second wave of infections.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council (and a focus of the debate) is to understand how the pandemic has affected Africa and how the Council can work effectively with other international, regional and local actors to support recovery from the crisis. Of particular concern to the Council is how COVID-19 has interacted with and exacerbated root causes of conflict in Africa.

How the international community can help African countries bring COVID-19 under control is an overarching key issue since there can be no sustainable recovery without first containing the virus. That includes support for strained health systems and much

greater access for African countries to vaccines.

Recovery from the pandemic also involves addressing its economic and social impacts. This includes considering how to support African countries in better implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals and the AU's 2063 Agenda, especially in conflict-affected and fragile states that are most vulnerable to being destabilised by socioeconomic fragilities and disruptions. A related issue is improving governance and state institutions that, as the pandemic has demonstrated, largely lacked the capacities to respond effectively. Another key issue is cooperation between the UN and regional and subregional organisations, which will be critical during African countries' recovery.

The Council may adopt a presidential statement that could call for increasing the provision of vaccines to African countries by producers and donors to the COVAX Facility, recalling, as stated in resolution 2565, the role of extensive immunisation against COVID-19 as a global public good for health. On vaccines, a statement could also encourage support for developing manufacturing capacity of vaccines on the continent. A presidential statement may further highlight the importance of integrated approaches and peacebuilding activities that tackle root causes of conflict by promoting development and institution-building as well as protecting human rights and increasing women's participation in society.

Council Dynamics

Recent years have seen Council members place more emphasis on tackling the root causes of conflict, often related to development, governance, climate change, and human rights—though they do not necessarily always agree on these root causes—and on the benefit of comprehensive, integrated approaches for maintaining international peace and security. Over the course of the pandemic, Council meetings have regularly considered how the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated such socio-economic problems and the risk this posed to global security.

While the Council was supportive of the Secretary-General's global ceasefire appeal to combat the pandemic, it took three months to adopt a resolution sponsored by France and Tunisia because of US-China tensions as the US sought to blame China and the WHO for the pandemic. With the new US administration, Council discussion around the pandemic has been much less divisive. The Council swiftly agreed on resolution 2565 on COVID-19 vaccines, adopting it as a “presidential text”, meaning all 15 Council members co-sponsored the resolution. It had in total 115 member-state co-sponsors—the third highest of any Council resolution. There were some differences during its negotiation: the US successfully opposed language on “putting people at the centre of the response” from resolution 2532, which the US considered to be language associated with President Xi Jinping of China. But members overcame their differences, keen to support the resolution and improve the Council discourse on COVID-19 compared to last year.

A difference that sometimes arises in discussing responses to the pandemic is over sanctions. Russia and China often recall, as have other members, their view that unilaterally-imposed sanctions should be waived as they can undermine countries' capacity to respond to the pandemic. The US and European countries, in particular, push back against such references to sanctions in Council products.

Sudan

Expected Council Action

In May, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing on the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS). The briefing will cover the Secretary-General's report on UNITAMS, which includes information about the drawdown and withdrawal of the AU/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) as an annex, requested in resolutions 2524 and 2559.

The mandate of UNITAMS expires on 3 June in accordance with resolution 2524.

Key Recent Developments

Sudan has made progress in its democratic transition since the Juba Peace Agreement was signed on 3 October 2020. The transitional government has agreed on five national priorities, namely: addressing the socio-economic conditions, implementing the Juba Peace Agreement and resuming negotiations with the two non-signatories, security sector reform and the protection of civilians, international relations, and advancing Sudan's democratic transition. However, significant political, security, humanitarian and economic challenges exist. Several aspects of the Constitutional Document and the Juba Peace Agreement have yet to be implemented, including the formation of the Transitional Legislative Council, with at least 40 percent female representation.

The security situation in parts of Darfur remains precarious, with intercommunal violence, human rights violations and abuses, violations of international humanitarian law, and large-scale displacement. Intercommunal clashes in El Geneina, West Darfur, in January left 250 people dead and over 100,000 displaced, according to UNHCHR. In early April, violent clashes occurred again in El Geneina, resulting in the reported death of over 80 people. According to OCHA, approximately 40,000 people were displaced as a result. On 5 April, the Security and Defence Council declared a state of emergency, and the Sudanese Attorney General announced that 15 prosecutors had been sent to West Darfur to investigate the violence. According to the International Organization for Migration, close to 237,00 people were displaced by conflict in Darfur in the first four months of 2021, more than four times the 53,000 people who were conflict-displaced in all of 2020, creating a significant increase in new humanitarian needs.

In response to the violence in West Darfur, Special Representative for Sudan and head of UNITAMS Volker Perthes said in a statement on 6 April that the "UN is committed to support the Government of Sudan in fulfilling its responsibility to protect civilians and in addressing the underlying causes of this continuing violence". Perthes also said that the UN and its humanitarian partners were mobilising additional staff and resources to respond to the displacement and growing humanitarian needs. On 14 April, Security Council members held an informal interactive dialogue (IID) on the situation with the participation of Sudan and Perthes. The UK, the penholder on Sudan, organised the meeting. The situation in Darfur was discussed, as were steps taken by the transitional government to protect civilians and UNITAMS' role in supporting the government in this regard.

UNAMID's drawdown and exit is ongoing in accordance with

resolution 2559, and it is expected to complete the withdrawal of all uniformed and civilian personnel by 30 June, other than those required for the mission's liquidation, as requested in resolution 2559. Five of the 15 team sites have been handed over, with all remaining team sites to be handed over by the end of May, with the exception of El Fasher, the Khartoum Liaison Office and Port Sudan.

Tensions continue along the border with Ethiopia, including intermittent clashes with reports of intensifying military operations. The Secretary-General's March report on UNITAMS expressed concern over the escalation in tensions between the two countries regarding the Fashaqah area along their border. The report also noted that since 9 November 2020, more than 61,000 refugees from the Tigray region of Ethiopia have fled to eastern Sudan.

On 9 March, the Council received a briefing on UNITAMS and UNAMID from Perthes and Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support Atul Khare. Kholood Khair, managing partner of Insight Strategy Partners, briefed as a member of civil society based in Khartoum. Perthes noted that "Sudan is making significant advances in its transition" but that "the remaining challenges are staggering". He told the Council that the UN is working to support the transitional government to strengthen the protection of civilians, including through technical advice and capacity-building support. He emphasised that "UNITAMS is a small mission with a broad mandate" and referred to the imminent launch of the Sudan Peacemaking, Peacebuilding and Stabilization Programme, which is a framework between UNITAMS and the UN country team to jointly implement resolution 2524, which established UNITAMS.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 9 April, a spokesperson for the High Commissioner for Human Rights said in a press briefing, "we are appalled by the latest resurgence of violence...in West Darfur" and that they were "disturbed by the slow progress in ensuring accountability for this and previous violence". The spokesperson said that "the authorities failed to stop the clashes despite a robust security force presence in the town". The spokesperson also called on the government of Sudan to accelerate the implementation of the National Plan for the Protection of Civilians and added that "all tribes responsible for violence in Darfur must be disarmed and the state must be able to maintain order and ensure the rule of law, including by preventing armed civilians from taking the law into their own hands".

Key Issues and Options

A key issue is assessing the role of UNITAMS across the four strategic objectives for the mission contained in resolution 2524: assisting Sudan's political transition; supporting peace processes and implementing future peace agreements; assisting peacebuilding, civilian protection and rule of law in Darfur and the Two Areas (that is, South Kordofan and Blue Nile); and supporting the mobilisation of economic and development assistance and coordination of humanitarian assistance.

A related issue for the Council is to consider what changes to the mandate, if any, are necessary ahead of its expiration on 3 June. In doing so, Council members will be informed by the findings and recommendations of the upcoming 90-day report of the Secretary-General, expected in mid-May. The report is also expected to include

UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2562 (11 February 2021) extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts for one year. S/RES/2559 (22 December 2020) was on the end of the mandate of UNAMID. S/RES/2524 (3 June 2020) established UNITAMS for an initial period of 12 months. Security Council Meeting Record S/2021/246 (11 March 2021) was a record of the briefing on 9 March on UNITAMS and UNAMID. Secretary-General's Report S/2021/199 (1 March 2021) was the 90-day report on UNITAMS.

Sudan

“clear and measurable” benchmarks and indicators, “to track UNITAMS’ progress against its strategic objectives and to enable early planning for a future reconfiguration of the UN presence in Sudan”, as requested in resolution 2524.

A likely option is for the Council to renew the mandate of UNITAMS for one year, maintaining the four strategic objectives of the mission while making some adjustments. In doing so, Council members might consider language to further prioritise the mandated tasks within each of the four areas. In particular this could include highlighting: support for the implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement (signed after the adoption of resolution 2524 establishing UNITAMS), implementation of the government’s National Plan for Civilian Protection (S/2020/429), and advisory and capacity building support for security authorities.

Another key issue that Council members will want to follow closely is the security situation in Darfur, particularly in light of the drawdown and exit of UNAMID currently underway, as set out in resolution 2559. The transition from UNAMID to UNITAMS is a priority for the Council. In future, Council members could hold another IID, should the security situation in Darfur deteriorate, with the participation of Sudan.

Council Dynamics

Council members welcome the political progress in Sudan. However, the dire economic and humanitarian situations are particularly worrisome to many members, and divisions persist in assessing the situation in Darfur. Despite the unanimous adoption of resolution 2524 in June 2020 establishing UNITAMS, there were clear disagreements during the negotiations over references to monitoring and reporting on progress in the implementation of Sudan’s Constitutional Document, the provision of technical assistance in the

areas of rule of law and security sector reform, and reporting on the human rights situation. There were also strong differences on the mission’s potential tasks relating to the protection of civilians. While several members believed that the new mission should have a mandate to protect civilians, others (Russia, China and the three African members among them) opposed the inclusion of such tasks in the mandate. (For more, see our *What’s In Blue* story of 3 June 2020.)

At the 9 March briefing, Council members expressed a variety of views about the role of UNITAMS and its relationship with the Sudanese government. Estonia, France, Ireland, the UK and the US called for Sudan to finalise the status-of-mission agreement to enable the effective operation of UNITAMS. China said UNITAMS should focus on the peace process and mobilising economic assistance, while fully respecting the views of the Sudanese government. Russia expressed its hope that the mission would strengthen Sudan’s capacity around peacebuilding, promoting economic reforms, implementing sustainable security sector reform and maintaining peace and the rule of law. France and Viet Nam underscored their support for the rapid full operationalisation of UNITAMS. The UK maintained that the government should work with UNITAMS, including its integrated country team, to identify priority areas for support from UNITAMS in line with its mandate; Estonia and Ireland emphasised this perspective as well.

Many members also condemned or expressed concern during the briefing over the recent violence in Darfur, including Estonia, France, Ireland, Mexico, the UK, and the US. (Kenya, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Norway did not make statements at the briefing.)

The UK is the penholder on Sudan, and the US is the penholder on Sudan sanctions. Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia) chairs the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee.

Protection of Civilians

Expected Council Action

In May, the Council will hold its annual debate on protection of civilians (POC) in armed conflict via an open videoconference (VTC). Non-Council members are invited to participate and, because of the remote working methods adopted to slow the spread of COVID-19, can submit their statements to the Council. The Council president will then publish a compendium of all submissions on the Council’s website and include it in the UN electronic document system.

Secretary-General António Guterres and ICRC President Peter Maurer, who are the regular briefers for the debate, are expected to brief. China, as Council President during May, may choose to invite additional briefers. Council members are expected to receive the Secretary-General’s annual POC report by 4 May. This year’s open debate will most likely focus on the protection of medical care, which is expected to be a major feature of this year’s POC report.

Key Recent Developments

The thematic focus of the debate coincides with the five-year anniversary of resolution 2286, which addressed the protection of the wounded or sick, and of medical and humanitarian personnel carrying out medical duties in a conflict setting. It called on parties to armed conflicts to ensure unhindered passage of medical personnel and the safe transport of necessary supplies. The resolution also drew attention to the long-term adverse effects on the local population of attacks on national health care systems and workers. Citing WHO figures, the 2020 report of the Secretary-General on POC referenced 1,006 security incidents affecting health care, 825 of which resulted in casualties. Incidents included destruction of medical facilities, attacks on medical transport, military use of medical facilities, and the removal of medical items from humanitarian convoys. The report further noted that the conflict-related disruption of medical services

UN DOCUMENTS ON PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2573 (27 April 2021) condemned attacks on civilian infrastructure in conflicts. S/RES/2475 (20 June 2019) was on protection of persons with disabilities in conflict; it was adopted unanimously. S/RES/2474 (11 June 2019) was on persons reported missing during armed conflict. S/RES/2286 (3 May 2016) condemned attacks on health care workers and facilities in armed conflict. **Secretary-General’s Reports** S/2020/366 (6 May 2020) was the annual report on protection of civilians in armed conflict. S/2019/373 (7 May 2019) was the annual report on protection of civilians, which included a section on “missing persons”. **Security Council Letters** S/2021/217 (3 March 2021) was the concept note for the 11 March 2021 open debate on conflict and food security. S/2020/930 (21 September 2020) contained the record of the briefings and statements made during the 17 September VTC on conflict-induced food insecurity and the risk of famine. S/2020/402 (14 May 2020) was the concept note by Estonia about the open VTC on protection of civilians, held on 27 May.

Protection of Civilians

resulted in thousands of hours lost in providing medical care and medical consultations.

The Secretary-General's upcoming POC report is also likely to take stock of the status of several related topics, including responses to his March 2020 call for a global ceasefire to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and to allow necessary medical interventions to take place safely. In this context, the report may also explore how the pandemic has affected POC measures. Other topics likely to be featured are the state of protection trends in terms of humanitarian access, the use of explosives in populated areas, counter-terrorism measures in a POC context, and specific country situations.

Council members and the wider UN membership will have just considered the destruction of medical infrastructure, among other issues, during an open high-level debate organised by Viet Nam on 27 April, covering the protection of critical infrastructure in armed conflicts. The debate focused on safeguarding essential civilian objects from direct or indiscriminate attacks on facilities such as homes, schools, places of worship, markets, infrastructure, such as agricultural assets; drinking water installations and supplies; irrigation works; wastewater management and sanitary systems; as well as energy systems, and medical facilities. On the same day, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2573, condemning attacks against civilians and civilian objects in situations of armed conflict and demanding that all parties to conflict cease such practices; encouraging efforts to protect objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, and stressing the need to facilitate the unhindered delivery and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine in areas of armed conflict.

As Council president in March, the US convened a high-level debate on 10 March on conflict and food security, recalling resolution 2417 on conflict-induced food insecurity. The debate centred around the effects of conflict, including displacement; destruction of crops or pastures; destruction of relevant infrastructure; and disruption of local economies, but the resolution also referenced the need to protect medical personnel and humanitarian workers engaged in medical duties.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, briefed the Council on 18 June 2020 on the situation of refugees, covering several country situations, addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugee populations, and stressing the need to implement the Global Compact on Refugees. The compact provides guidance to the international community on how to support refugees and meet their needs in ways that benefit them and their host communities.

The last open debate on POC took place on 27 May 2020, organised as a high-level VTC event by Estonia as Council President. In his remarks, Guterres highlighted UN peacekeeping operations as one of the most effective means to protect civilians in conflict situations. Currently, POC is included in the mandates of seven peacekeeping missions.

Key Issues and Options

Since the adoption of resolution 1265 in 1999, an elaborate POC ecosystem has been developed. However, there continues to be a gap between theoretical and practical protection and compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law. The implementation of POC mandates in peace operations and accountability for serious violations also remains an issue. Council members may wish to stress the importance of closing this gap in their statements.

A related issue is the implementation of resolution 2286 and the urgent need to ensure adequate protection of health care services and facilities in a number of issues on the Council's agenda. Council members may call for more attention to be paid to the obstacles to providing protection in these situations.

Emerging issues include the fragmentation of the agenda as members choose to focus on newer aspects of the protection of civilians in conflict, including persons with disabilities, hunger and conflict, and weapons technology. Many of these issues are relevant in conflict situations on the Council's agenda, but how to retain a holistic approach to POC across the board, and avoid the uneven distribution of attention and resources, remain an open question. Council members may choose to request the informal working group on POC to take up this issue for further discussion.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Member states are likely to use the debate to highlight their individual protection priorities. While Council members may interpret and highlight some of the newer issues, including climate change and its impact on POC, others may wish to keep within the already-established normative framework.

Some member states may use the debate to draw attention to conflict situations not currently on the formal agenda of the Council. In recent months, some Council and non-Council member states have used thematic debates to make public statements about the situation in Ethiopia's Tigray region, which has hitherto been addressed solely under the agenda item "any other business".

Member states' views also diverge regarding the applicability of different frameworks regarding the provision of humanitarian assistance. Resolution 2286 reaffirms "the need for all parties to armed conflict to respect the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence in the provision of humanitarian assistance, including medical assistance". In recent years, several Council members, in particular China and Russia, have started to emphasise the UN guiding principles for humanitarian assistance adopted by the General Assembly in 1991, which stress state sovereignty and consent of the concerned member state. These increasingly divergent views on the content of humanitarian principles have affected the negotiations of a number of recent Council products, resulting in the inclusion of both approaches to humanitarian principles or, at times, neither.

South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In May, the Council expects to vote on a draft resolution to renew the South Sudan sanctions regime—including targeted sanctions and the arms embargo—which expires on 31 May and the mandate of the South Sudan Sanctions Committee Panel of Experts, which expires on 1 July, as set out in resolution 2521.

Key Recent Developments

South Sudan will mark ten years of independence in July. The permanent ceasefire continues to hold in most parts of the country, and overall levels of political violence remain lower since the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) on 12 September 2018. However, slow and selective implementation of the R-ARCSS has contributed to uncertainty around the peace process. Localised ethnic and intercommunal violence continues. The human rights, humanitarian, food security, and economic conditions in the country remain dire, with an enormously detrimental effect on civilians.

On 29 May 2020, the Council adopted resolution 2521, renewing the South Sudan sanctions regime until 31 May and the mandate of the Panel of Experts until 1 July. The Council expressed its intention to carry out a midterm review of the sanctions measures by 15 December 2020 and “its readiness to consider adjusting [these] measures...including through modifying, suspending, lifting or strengthening measures to respond to the situation”. The resolution also requested the Secretariat to provide the Council with a report assessing the role of the arms embargo in facilitating implementation of the R-ARCSS and articulating options for the elaboration of benchmarks, which the Council received on 31 October 2020.

On 16 December 2020, following its midterm review, the Council sent a letter requesting the Secretary-General to provide recommendations by 31 March on benchmarks to assess the arms embargo. The resulting report outlined three key benchmarks (with 34 specific targets) for the Security Council to assess the arms embargo, namely progress in relation to political and governance issues; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration and security sector reform; and the humanitarian and human rights situation. It concluded that “there is real need to accelerate progress in meeting the key provisions of the [R-ARCSS]” and that the benchmarks “could play an important role in facilitating the implementation of the [R-ARCSS]”. Following the establishment of the benchmarks, “progress on their implementation should be regularly reviewed, with a view to adjusting or lifting the embargo once the stated objectives for this sanctions measure are fully met”.

On 15 December 2020, Ambassador Dang Dinh Quy (Viet Nam), chair of the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee, briefed the Council on South Sudan sanctions. Council members were last briefed on South Sudan on 3 March by David Shearer, the outgoing Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), on the Secretary-General’s 90-day report dated 23 February. Shearer raised concern over a power vacuum at the local level, which has presented opportunities

for spoilers and national actors to exploit local tensions and fuel violence. Jackline Nasiwa, Founder and National Director, Centre for Inclusive Governance, Peace and Justice, briefed as a member of civil society based in South Sudan.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 46th session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) adopted resolution 46/23 on 24 March by a vote of 20 in favour, 16 against (including Russia and China) and 11 abstentions (including India). The resolution decided to extend the mandate of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan for one year. It requested the Commission to convene two workshops on transitional justice with the participation of relevant stakeholders. The resolution also requested OHCHR to provide the government of South Sudan with technical assistance to support the realisation of the indicators contained in the resolution and requested the Secretary-General to provide OHCHR with all necessary resources. The HRC also adopted resolution 46/29 on technical assistance and capacity-building for South Sudan without a vote. That resolution requested OHCHR, in cooperation with the government of South Sudan and the AU, to urgently assist South Sudan to address human rights challenges in the post-conflict transition by, among other things, monitoring and reporting on the situation of human rights in South Sudan and to make recommendations to improve the situation and prevent any deterioration.

On 31 March, the Human Rights Division of UNMISS released its annual brief on violence affecting civilians, covering 2020. It said that in 2020 there had been a 120 percent increase in victims affected compared to 2019 and that the number of killings and abductions increased significantly. The number of recorded cases of conflict-related sexual violence declined slightly. Sub-national violence involving civil defence groups or community-based militias accounted for 78 percent of victims.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 14 April, the Panel of Experts assisting the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee transmitted their final report. It states that selective and slow implementation of the R-ARCSS has hindered improvements in the protection of civilians and prospects for long-term peace with disagreements over its implementation increasing political, military and ethnic divisions. More people in South Sudan are in need of humanitarian assistance in 2021 than ever before, the report says. It recommends, given the deteriorating security situation in South Sudan, that the Council maintains the arms embargo and requests an independent evaluation of the government’s management of its arms stockpiles. Other recommendations include adding a stand-alone designation criterion for sanctions in relation to any actions or policies that threaten or undermine the implementation of the transitional justice mechanisms. It also recommends that the Committee impose targeted sanctions on military leaders who have obstructed the activities of international peacekeeping and diplomatic missions, and the delivery and distribution of humanitarian aid.

Key Issues and Options

An immediate key issue for the Council is to make a decision on renewing the sanctions regime and the Panel of Experts. In doing so, the Council could signal its concerns about misuse of public resources by government officials in ways that undermine stability in the country. It might also encourage South Sudan’s cooperation and dialogue with the Panel of Experts. Another option is to consider incorporating benchmarks into a resolution outlining conditions that would need to be met for targeted sanctions and the arms embargo to be lifted.

Another key issue for the Council is the implementation of

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOUTH SUDAN [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2514](#) (12 March 2020) renewed the mandate of UNMISS. [S/RES/2521](#) (29 May 2020) extended the sanctions regime. [Secretary-General’s Reports S/2021/321](#) (31 March 2021) was on benchmarks to assess the arms embargo. [S/2021/172](#) (23 February 2021) was the 90-day report on South Sudan. [S/2020/1067](#) (31 October 2020) was the assessment of the role of the arms embargo. [Security Council Meeting Records S/2021/219](#) (5 March 2021) was a compilation of the briefings and statements from Council members’ 3 March 2021 videoconference on South Sudan. [S/2020/1237](#) (17 December 2020) was a compilation of the briefings and statements from Council members’ 15 December 2020 videoconference on South Sudan. [Security Council Letter S/2020/1277](#) (16 December 2020) requested the Secretary-General to provide recommendations for benchmarks to assess the arms embargo measures. [Sanctions Committee Document S/2021/365](#) (14 April 2021) was the final report of the Panel of Experts.

South Sudan

the arms embargo and targeted sanctions. The findings and recommendations of the panel's final report are likely to inform the Council's further consideration regarding implementation of the sanctions regime.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Sanctions on South Sudan remain a divisive issue in the Council. When the Council last renewed the sanctions regime in May 2020 through resolution 2521, China, Russia and South Africa abstained. (For more details, see our *What's in Blue* story of 28 May 2020.) Several members of the Council (France, the US, the UK and others) believe that sanctions are a useful tool to foster stability in South Sudan and to maintain pressure on the parties to implement the R-ARCSS. They generally hold the view that the arms embargo has reduced the flow of weapons to South Sudan, directly contributing to the reduction of violence, and have expressed concern that the absence of an arms embargo would negatively affect the security situation.

Other Council members have a less favourable view of the sanctions regime. These members tend to underscore the need for the Council to encourage progress in the political and security spheres and believe that current measures could be counterproductive in this regard. China and Russia have had long-standing concerns about the South Sudan sanctions regime; they both abstained in July 2018 on resolution 2428, which initially imposed the arms embargo on South Sudan, and in May 2019 on resolution 2471, which extended the sanctions regime for one year. (For background on developments leading to the imposition of the UN arms embargo on South Sudan, please see our "In Hindsight" in the September 2018 *Monthly Forecast*).

At the briefing on 3 March, Council members' differing positions on sanctions were clearly expressed. China "called on the international community to respond to the AU's initiative and lift sanctions against South Sudan as soon as possible". Kenya, Niger, Tunisia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (the A3 plus 1) said "recent improvements in the political and security situation make

it opportune for the Council to evaluate the efficacy of the sanctions imposed on South Sudan" and called for "specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound targets that could be easily assessed against the progress achieved". Russia referred to sanctions on South Sudan as "excessive pressure" and referred to its expectation "that the Council will soon elaborate clear target indicators that will allow for a review of effective restrictions". India noted its support for establishing "a clear benchmarking process to assess the arms embargo". Mexico said that "any review of the arms embargo must be based on the situation on the ground and the ability to control unrestricted arms flows". The UK called on the government to "ensure adequate training and resourcing of the necessary unified forces", which "does not require any easing of the arms embargo" and emphasised that that government can submit exemption requests for consideration by the sanctions committee. Viet Nam said that "sanctions measures should be subjected to review in accordance with developments on the ground and removed when the conditions are met".

The South Sudanese government holds the view that the sanctions regime is counterproductive and impedes its ability to defend itself and establish the necessary unified forces required under the R-ARCSS, as expressed in the 31 October 2020 report of the Secretary-General. The AU Peace and Security Council and IGAD have repeatedly called for the lifting of all punitive measures on South Sudan, including multilateral sanctions, and several regional states have expressed opposition to the arms embargo. The 31 October 2020 report said that the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism holds the view "that the arms embargo has had an effect on the overall decrease in violence by reducing the free flow of weapons and ammunition" and most of the civil society representatives consulted expressed the view that "the arms embargo had prevented the supply of heavy weaponry, although the embargo had not had an effect on the flow of small arms, which had continued unimpeded".

The US is the penholder on South Sudan. Ambassador Dang Dinh Quy (Viet Nam) chairs the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee.

DPRK (North Korea)

Expected Council Action

In May, the chair of the 1718 Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Mona Juul (Norway), is expected to brief Council members in consultations on the 90-day report about the committee's work.

Key Recent Developments

After a one-year pause, the DPRK resumed ballistic missile testing on 25 March, launching two projectiles off its eastern coast into the Sea of Japan. The DPRK state news agency confirmed the tests and indicated that the missiles are part of a newly developed weapons system. DPRK senior military official Ri Pyong Chol, who oversaw

the tests, hailed the significance of the newly developed missiles in deterring existing threats to the country and strengthening the DPRK's overall military power. Japan, the Republic of Korea and the US condemned the tests. During media remarks on 25 March, US President Joe Biden said that the DPRK's missile tests violated resolution 1718. Biden said the US would respond accordingly should the DPRK escalate the situation, but he also emphasised that he is prepared to engage in diplomatic efforts on the condition that the DPRK denuclearises.

The US called a meeting of the sanctions committee on 26 March to discuss the DPRK's missile tests. During the meeting, the committee requested the Panel of Experts to examine the evidence

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DPRK [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2569](#) (26 March 2021) extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee until 30 April 2022. [S/RES/2397](#) (22 December 2017) tightened sanctions on the DPRK. [Security Council Letter S/2021/296](#) (26 March 2021) was from the president of the Security Council, containing the results of the vote on resolution 2569. [Sanctions Committee Document S/2021/211](#) (4 March 2021) was the final report of the Panel of Experts.

DPRK (North Korea)

on the tests and report back to the committee. Four days later, Council members discussed the issue in consultations under “any other business”. Estonia, Ireland, Norway, the UK, and France initiated the meeting.

Since President Biden took office in January, his administration has indicated that it would conduct a full review of US policy towards the DPRK. The US State Department has signalled that the review process is entering its final stages and could be completed in the coming weeks. In several of his recent remarks to the media, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has emphasised that the main priority for the US remains the denuclearisation of the DPRK. He also said that the US would maintain strong sanctions pressure on the DPRK while leaving room for diplomacy.

The Panel of Experts published its final report on 4 March, covering the period from 4 August 2020 to 5 February. While the DPRK did not conduct any nuclear or ballistic missile tests during the reporting period, it has continued to violate a range of other sanctions measures imposed by the Council. Most notably, the DPRK has continued to develop its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. The DPRK showcased its newly developed submarine-launched and intercontinental ballistic missile systems during military parades in January of this year and in October 2020. The DPRK has continued to import refined petroleum products via illicit ship-to-ship transfers and direct deliveries. The panel noted that according to the data received from one member state, the DPRK has far exceeded its annual import limit of 500,000 barrels of refined petroleum products as set by resolution 2397. The final report also detailed instances of the DPRK’s engaging in malicious cyber activity aimed at obtaining financial assets (virtual and fiat) in violation of Security Council sanctions. The DPRK has also conducted cyberattacks against officials of Council member states.

On 26 March, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2569, which extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1718 Sanctions Committee until 30 April 2022. The resolution set deadlines for the panel to submit its midterm and final reports to the Council by 6 September and 25 February 2022, respectively.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 46th session, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution 46/17 on the human rights situation in the DPRK on 23 March without a vote. The resolution decided to continue to strengthen, for a period of two years, the capacity of the Office of the High Commissioner, including its field-based structure in Seoul, so that it can implement relevant recommendations in the report by the Group of Independent Experts on Accountability. Those recommendations called for strengthening current monitoring and documentation efforts, establishing a central information and evidence repository, and having legal experts assess information and testimonies, all with the aim of developing possible strategies to be used in any future accountability process. It also extended the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK for one year.

Key Issues and Options

The DPRK’s violation of Security Council resolutions—including through testing and developing weapons systems—remains an ongoing issue. After a yearlong pause, the DPRK’s resumption of ballistic missile testing in March renewed the Council’s concerns over the security situation on the Korean Peninsula. Also, the DPRK has

continued to develop new weapons systems, including intercontinental ballistic missiles. At present, the DPRK has shown no interest in engaging in diplomatic talks with either the US or the Republic of Korea.

An option for the Council would be to convene an informal interactive dialogue with key regional stakeholders to discuss new ways of addressing the security threat posed by the DPRK. The Council could also consider adopting a formal outcome addressing the need for stability on the Korean Peninsula and calling for the resumption of diplomatic talks. Should the DPRK escalate its missile-testing activity, an option for the Council would be to consider further tightening of sanctions measures.

As evident from the final report of the Panel of Experts, violations of the sanctions regime remain an ongoing issue for the Council. In response, the Council could issue a statement calling on member states to adhere to existing sanctions measures.

The ongoing dire human rights situation in the DPRK remains an issue. However, the Council broke its practice of holding an annual briefing with the High Commissioner for Human Rights on this topic in 2018. An option for the Council would be to explore the possibility of holding such a meeting this year.

Council Dynamics

Members continue to be divided over the role of sanctions in addressing the nuclear threat posed by the DPRK. The US has been a strong proponent of maintaining a maximum pressure policy until the DPRK takes concrete steps towards denuclearisation. The EU members of the Council are generally supportive of this approach. On the other hand, China and Russia have shown interest in considering some form of sanctions relief. In December 2019, they circulated a draft resolution providing partial sanctions relief for the DPRK, but the proposal was not put to a vote and remains stalled because of insufficient support from other Council members.

Council members have been generally united in their concern about the potential consequences for the DPRK of a widespread outbreak of COVID-19. On this front, there has been broad support among sanctions committee members for accelerating the process for considering humanitarian exceptions.

The new US administration is currently reviewing its policy towards the DPRK. Once completed, this could potentially have some impact on overall dynamics in the Council. Another factor that could play a role in changing the Council’s approach is whether the DPRK decides to reengage in diplomatic efforts with the US. These efforts remain at an impasse since the collapse of the February 2019 US-DPRK summit in Hanoi.

The US is the penholder on the DPRK, and Ambassador Mona Juul (Norway) chairs the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee.

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