

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

In August, India will have the presidency of the Security Council. Most meetings are expected to be in person this month.

India has chosen to convene two signature events during its presidency. One is a high-level videoconference (VTC) open debate on [maritime security](#). Narendra Modi, India's prime minister, will chair the meeting. Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, the Secretary-General's Chef de Cabinet, and Ghada Fathi Waly, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), are expected to brief the Council. A presidential statement is an expected outcome.

India is also planning to hold a ministerial-level open debate on "[Technology and Peacekeeping](#)". India's Minister of External Affairs, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, will chair the debate. Under-Secretaries-General for Peace Operations and Operational Support, Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Atul Khare, respectively, are expected to brief. A presidential statement is an anticipated outcome. India may also pursue a resolution on the protection of peacekeepers during the month.

The Council will meet to discuss the Secretary-General's 13th strategic-level report on the [threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant \(ISIL or Da'esh\)](#) in August. India's Minister of External Affairs, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, is expected to chair the meeting. Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov, the head of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), and Assistant Secretary-General Michèle Coninx, the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), are expected to brief.

The Council is expected to hold its monthly

meetings on the political and humanitarian situations and on the use of chemical weapons in [Syria](#). Other Middle East issues on the programme of work this month are expected to be:

- [Lebanon](#), a meeting on the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the renewal of UNIFIL's mandate;
- [Yemen](#), the monthly meeting on developments;
- "[The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question](#)", the monthly meeting; and
- [Iraq](#), a meeting on the most recent developments and the Secretary-General's two upcoming reports concerning the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and missing Kuwaiti property and missing third party and Kuwaiti nationals.

African issues that the Council expects to address in August are:

- [Somalia](#), a meeting on the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) and the renewal of the UNSOM mandate; and
- [Mali](#), the renewal of the Mali asset freeze and travel ban sanctions and the mandate of the Mali Sanctions Committee's Panel of Experts, as well as consideration of the Secretary-General's 15 July report with recommendations on the force level of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

The quarterly briefing by the chair of the 1718 [DPRK](#) Sanctions Committee is also anticipated in August.

The Council will continue to follow developments in Ethiopia (Tigray), Haiti and Myanmar closely during the month. Meetings on these and other issues are possible.

In Hindsight: Getting Across the Line on Syria's Cross-Border Mechanism

On 9 July, in an astonishing show of unity on a perennially contentious issue, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2585, re-authorising the cross-border mechanism to deliver

humanitarian assistance into Syria's northwest. Not since the adoption of resolution 2332 in December 2016 had the Council reached consensus on the cross-border humanitarian aid delivery

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In Hindsight: Getting Across the Line

mechanism for Syria. And, unlike in December 2019, January 2020 and again in July 2020, the Council voted only on one draft text.

While resolution 2585 offered the rarest of encouraging signs in the Council chamber on Syria, the unanimous adoption belied a difficult two weeks of negotiations. How the Council overcame its divisions to adopt this resolution is a classic diplomatic tale of compromise and constructive ambiguity. As one Council member noted privately, “every country got something it wanted in the end”. But rifts may lie ahead: resolution 2585 also contains elements that Council members had fought against, sometimes vigorously. Against this backdrop, will the agreement allow the Council to put the acrimony on the cross-border mechanism behind it and find new ways to work together on Syria? The text, and the process by which the Council agreed on it, may offer some clues.

(For a detailed account of the background on the cross-border mechanism and the events surrounding last year’s adoption, please see our “In Hindsight” from the August 2020 Forecast, titled: “Six Days, Five Resolutions, One Border Crossing”.)

Lines Drawn

From the moment the Council renewed the cross-border mechanism with the adoption of resolution 2533 in July 2020, speculation about its future was rife. Month after month, the Council’s regular sessions on the humanitarian situation in Syria painted an increasingly dire picture. Council members remained rooted in their diverging positions, notably over the impact of cross-line delivery of aid and of sanctions, the duration of the cross-border mechanism and the number of border crossings necessary to meet Syria’s humanitarian needs, and the seemingly peripheral issue of early recovery funds.

Russia and China have consistently argued that sanctions against Syria should be lifted, saying that they exacerbate the country’s worsening economic conditions. They maintained that improvements were needed in cross-line deliveries—humanitarian assistance that crosses a domestic frontline from Syrian government-held areas into areas outside government control. These deliveries, they argued, would be sufficient, obviating the need for assistance to flow into Syria’s northwest from Turkey.

Secretary-General António Guterres told the Council on 23 June that “failure to extend the Council’s authorization would have devastating consequences”. While highlighting the importance of maintaining and expanding both cross-border and cross-line deliveries, the Secretary-General said that member states “must recognize that [cross-line deliveries] will never be able to replace cross-border assistance at the present levels”. In addition, the P3 (France, the United Kingdom and the United States) have regularly pointed out that sanctions offer humanitarian exemptions, and thus have not had an undue effect on Syria’s humanitarian crisis. The matter of funding for early recovery projects, such as support for water, sanitation, health, education, and shelter, has also been fraught, as the US and European members have been wary of backing recovery projects that they believe might strengthen the domestic political position of the Syrian government.

Russia and China have often sought shorter extensions of the cross-border aid mechanism than espoused by the penholders, with the length of the mandate a decisive factor during negotiations in 2019 and 2020. This time, as in past years, the Council’s other permanent members and several others argued forcefully for a 12-month renewal.

As the Council embarked upon negotiations in late June, the

outcome was by no means a foregone conclusion. The P5’s positions were well-known. The Council’s ten elected members, whose collective position was for keeping the cross-border mechanism open for another 12 months, had, however, expressed differing views on the issue of sanctions and the role of cross-line deliveries. The co-penholders—Ireland and Norway, both fresh to the Council in 2021—aimed to sort out these differences, creating space for a deal while maintaining a position that would hold the elected members together.

Negotiations Begin

On 25 June, the co-penholders circulated a zero draft of their resolution. One round of in-person negotiations among Council experts took place on 30 June. The co-penholders’ zero draft was nearly identical to resolution 2533 of 2020—which re-authorised one border crossing (Bab al-Hawa) for 12 months—but included the authorisation of AlYarubiyah, one of the four border crossings originally authorised by the Council. The P3, along with Estonia, reiterated their position that the resolution should authorise three border crossings (Bab al-Hawa, AlYarubiyah and Bab al-Salam) for a period of 12 months, while China, India and Russia raised concerns that the zero draft referred neither to the need for increased cross-line deliveries nor the adverse humanitarian effects of unilateral sanctions. Earlier that day, Russia’s permanent representative, Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia, had described reopening the closed cross-border points as “really a non-starter”.

A number of Council members privately characterised the days between the 30 June informal reading of the draft text and 6 July as the proverbial calm before the storm. On 6 July, the Council held closed consultations on Syria’s humanitarian situation, following which the co-penholders placed their unchanged zero draft under silence until 7 July. Russia did not explicitly address the contents of the text or offer revisions, but China broke silence, saying that it could not accept an additional border crossing and calling for the text to include language on the expansion of cross-line deliveries and the adverse effects of unilateral sanctions.

With the clock ticking (the mandate was set to expire on 10 July) and Russia refusing to formally engage on the text, the co-penholders removed the language re-authorising the AlYarubiyah crossing but made no further textual changes. They then placed the updated draft under silence until 10 am on 8 July. China maintained its position from the previous day. Nonetheless, the co-penholders decided to put the draft text in blue during the afternoon of 8 July, with the vote scheduled for 9 July.

Shortly after the co-penholders put their text in blue, Russia circulated—and put in blue—a rival draft text. It called for the authorisation of the Bab al-Hawa crossing for only six months, with the “anticipation of renewal subject to the Secretary General’s report on transparency in operations and progress on cross-line access”, seemingly conditioning future renewal of the cross-border mechanism upon the evolution of cross-line deliveries. The Russian text also encouraged “efforts to improve cross-line delivery of humanitarian assistance” and welcomed “all efforts and initiatives to broaden the humanitarian activities in Syria, including...early recovery projects”. There was, however, no reference to sanctions.

The Deal Gets Done

That Thursday evening (8 July), with two votes—both expected to fail—scheduled for Friday morning, the Council’s permanent

In Hindsight: Getting Across the Line

members met over dinner. Russia and the US appeared to be on the cusp of an agreement that could help forge a text which neither would veto and which could gain the support of all other Council members.

Since the 16 June summit between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin, there had been signs that the Russia-US bilateral talks might bear fruit, including on the issue of humanitarian access in Syria. This optimism was furthered after the 2 July meeting between Russian Special Presidential Envoy on Syrian Reconciliation Alexander Lavrentiev and US National Security Council Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa Brett McGurk. The broad contours of what would eventually become resolution 2585 were apparently discussed there. These included Russian proposals strengthening language on cross-line deliveries, early recovery projects and new reporting requirements. It seems other issues, such as sanctions, were also in the Russian proposal. The US made clear that this was a red line. The length of the renewal remained unresolved.

With two texts in blue, the co-penholders worked late into the night on Thursday, putting together a compromise draft, while Russia and the US continued to talk. By early Friday morning, a deal had been struck. The other permanent members and the co-penholders were informed, and at 9:30 am the P5 met again to discuss a new text—largely the work of the co-penholders, who had merged the Russian proposals on issues such as early recovery projects, reporting requirements and COVID-19. Operative paragraph two, which addresses the length of the mandate, was drafted by Russia and the US. The agreed language, a stroke of diplomatic constructive ambiguity, calls for the Bab al-Hawa crossing to be extended for six months (until 10 January 2022) with an extension of an additional six months (until 10 July 2022) “subject to the issuance of the Secretary General’s substantive report, with particular focus on transparency in operations, and progress on cross-line access in meeting humanitarian needs”.

The co-penholders put the draft in blue, and Russia and the US (but no other Council members) co-sponsored the text. Closed consultations were announced for 10 am, during which the co-penholders reported that there was a potential third draft, and both the penholders and Russia withdrew their draft texts in blue. Consultations were then adjourned while the co-penholders introduced the draft text to the E10. When Council members resumed consultations, the co-penholders circulated the new draft text and asked for it to be put in blue. At 11:25 am, the Council met in the Chamber to vote, adopting resolution 2585 by a vote of 15-0. Speaking to the Council afterwards, most Council members lauded the cooperation and consensus-building that enabled the unanimous passage of resolution 2585. Nebenzia, the Russian ambassador, described it as a historic moment, and hoped “that this kind of day will be a turning point”.

Points of Contention

Council members, while hailing the outcome, also raised concerns about the text. China, speaking in the Council after its vote, drew attention to the Council’s having “acted on elements [that] included...enhancing cross-line delivery, strengthening the transparency of the cross-border mechanism, [and] post-war reconstruction”, while also regretting that the text had not dealt with unilateral sanctions. France made clear that, along with its European partners, it would “not fund reconstruction and we will not lift sanctions until a credible political process is firmly in place...nor will we fund development

activities that would help strengthen the Syrian regime in the absence of progress towards a political solution”.

Despite the enhanced language on cross-line deliveries in the resolution, the P3 and numerous elected members did not mention it in their explanations of the vote. In contrast, Russia proclaimed that the Council had given “the green light for the cross-border mechanism to be gradually supplemented and then replaced by supplies across the contact lines”, and China stressed that the “cross-line mechanism should be the dominant channel for delivering humanitarian assistance”. Others were more muted. India, which had strongly supported language on cross-line deliveries, noted that “concrete steps need to be taken to address the hurdles that are obstructing the functioning of cross-line operations”. Tunisia proclaimed simply that it was “totally satisfied” with the references on cross-line deliveries. And Kenya said that it supported all modalities, including both cross-border and cross-line deliveries.

It is clear from the Council’s deliberations and post-meeting press encounters on 9 July that the starkest differences had always been on the length of the mandate. While ambiguous language enabled an agreement, does resolution 2585 extend the mandate for 12 months, or for six months plus an additional six months contingent on certain conditions?

In Council chamber on 9 July, the P3 were joined by Estonia and Mexico in stating categorically that the renewal was for 12 months, while Russia said nothing about the length of mandate. Some members, including the penholders, understand that the second six months will automatically follow the Secretary-General’s report; for others, the report’s “particular focus on transparency in operations, and progress on cross-line access in meeting humanitarian needs” is the condition by which the Council will grant the additional six months. A third interpretation is that the decisive factor will be progress on the ground, not simply what the Secretary-General reports. In an exchange with the press after the Council’s vote, Nebenzia left the door open, responding to a question about his previous statement that “12 months won’t fly” by saying, “six plus six is twelve. But mind the way it is phrased—it was not unintentional. It is not straight twelve months. And that was our red line, because you cannot expect that it will go without any assessment and reassessment of what’s happening on the ground. That’s why the second six-month period will be conditional on progress which we’ll make in other areas of humanitarian and political situation in Syria... There will be twelve months...provided that we see real progress on the ground and in the work of the UN in that area”.

Conclusion

Members are united in satisfaction at seeing two key Council members cooperate on the most troublesome of files. The backroom deal may have ruffled some diplomatic feathers: France and China made it known that they were unhappy with aspects of the agreement and, joined by the UK, might have preferred to be more involved in the final, bilateral discussions. The elected members appear to have been kept informed of developments by the penholders. Having a resolution emerge through a direct bilateral agreement and diligent effort by penholders could portend an era of constructive engagement on Syria. The continuation of cross-border deliveries through Bab al-Hawa into July 2022 may hinge on a report, its contents or progress on the ground in Syria. But it may also hinge on the state of US-Russia relations and whether the cooperation shown in early July is built upon over the next six months or, given a raft of other contentious bilateral matters, proves a short-lived fillip that loses its momentum by then.

Status Update since our July Forecast

Ethiopia (Tigray)

On 2 July, the Security Council convened in person for an open briefing on the situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia (S/PV.8812). Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo and Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Ramesh Rajasingham briefed the Council. The Permanent Representative of Ethiopia, Ambassador Taye Atske Selassie, also attended. Members expressed concern about the humanitarian situation in the Tigray region. Several of them called for the immediate withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Tigray. Some members also drew attention to the over 1,000 reports of conflict-related sexual violence committed across the region.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

On 7 July, the Security Council held an in-person briefing on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (S/PV.8813). Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the DRC and head of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) Bintou Keita briefed the Council on the Secretary-General's latest MONUSCO report, which covers the period from 19 March to 18 June 2021 (S/2021/587). The Council also received a briefing from Ritha Kibambe, the Deputy Department Head of the Laboratory of Medical Biology at the Ngaliema Clinic in the DRC.

West Africa and the Sahel

On 8 July, the Security Council held its biannual briefing (S/PV.8814) on West Africa and the Sahel. Special Representative and head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) Mahamat Saleh Annadif briefed, presenting the Secretary-General's 28 June report on West Africa and the Sahel (S/2021/612). Chantal Ayemou Kouadio, the President of Réseau Ivoirien pour la Défense des Droits de l'Enfant et de la Femme, also briefed. At the time of writing, Council members were negotiating a draft presidential statement that Ireland and Niger have proposed on the West Africa and Sahel region.

Haiti

In July, the Council addressed several rapidly unfolding events in Haiti. On 1 July, Council members issued a press statement as a follow-up to the regular meeting held on 17 June, reiterating their deep concern regarding deteriorating political, security and humanitarian conditions in Haiti and stressing the primary responsibility of the Government of Haiti to address the situation (SC/14571). On 7 July, the President of Haiti, Jovenel Moïse, was fatally shot in his home. On the same day, the Council issued a press statement condemning the attack, calling on all political stakeholders to refrain from any acts of violence and registering their determination to continue to monitor the situation (SC/14574). The Council met the following day in a private meeting to receive a briefing on the assassination from Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) Helen La Lime (S/PV.8815).

Ethiopia (Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam)

On 8 July, the Security Council convened to discuss the ongoing disagreement between Ethiopia and downriver countries Egypt

and Sudan with regard to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) (S/PV.8816). The Council was briefed by Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga; the Executive Director of the UN Environmental Programme, Inger Andersen; and Paul Losoko Efambe Empole of the Permanent Mission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the current Chair of the African Union (AU). The briefers called for a negotiated solution reached in good faith and enhanced collaboration when sharing the Nile waters, while recalling the 2015 Agreement on Declaration of Principles, in which all three parties committed to the equitable and reasonable use of water resources. In their interventions, several Council members deferred to ongoing negotiations at the AU-level, while others called for active Council involvement. Tunisia circulated a draft Security Council resolution on the GERD on 2 July, calling for Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan to resume negotiations on a binding agreement on the filling and operation of the GERD. Following the 8 July meeting, Tunisia circulated a revised draft resolution with comments due by 19 July. At the time of writing, the status of the resolution remained unclear. While little engagement from several Council members during the negotiation process was reported, the Council is still seemingly considering an outcome.

Colombia

On 13 July, the Security Council convened for an in-person briefing on Colombia (S/PV.8818). Special Representative and head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu briefed on recent developments and the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on the mission (S/2021/603). On 16 July, Council members issued a press statement (SC/14583), in which they expressed support for the three components of the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition—which is comprised of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP), the Truth Commission and the Unit for the Search for Persons Deemed as Missing—and emphasised the need to respect their autonomy.

Libya

On 15 July, the Security Council convened a ministerial-level briefing on the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and on the situation in the country (S/PV.8820). Special Envoy and head of UNSMIL Ján Kubiš briefed, covering his efforts in engaging with relevant Libyan stakeholders to advance progress towards organising parliamentary and presidential elections in December. He informed the Council that the political impasse regarding identifying the constitutional and legislative basis for holding the elections presents a risk for the work on other national priorities, particularly on the economic and security tracks. The same day, the Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2021/12) welcoming the second Berlin Conference on Libya, stressing the importance of elections and calling for the full implementation of the 2020 ceasefire agreement.

Preserving Humanitarian Space

On 16 July, the Council convened in person for a ministerial-level briefing on the protection of humanitarian space (S.PV/8822). The briefers were Amina J. Mohammed, the Deputy Secretary-General; Robert Mardini, the Director-General of the ICRC; and Lucile Grosjean, the Delegate Director for Advocacy at Action Against Hunger. The meeting provided an opportunity for Council members

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to exchange best practices and identify concrete recommendations regarding the protection of humanitarian space, particularly in relation to the protection of humanitarian workers, the facilitation of humanitarian access, and accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian law. In her briefing, Mohammed announced that the Secretary-General has asked the incoming Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs to appoint a special adviser on the preservation of humanitarian space and access.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

On 22 July, the Council voted in person (S/PV.8823) on a draft resolution on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Proposed by Russia and China, the draft resolution welcomed the designation of Christian Schmidt as High Representative and supported the appointment of the High Representative until 31 July 2022, with the “closure of the OHR [Office of the High Representative]”. It also decided that the powers of the High Representative for BiH, as described in the conclusion of the 1997 Peace Implementation Conference (PIC), are no longer necessary given the progress achieved by the Bosnian parties.

With a vote of 2 in favour and 13 abstentions—the highest number of abstentions recorded since the inception of the Security Council—the draft resolution failed to be adopted. Following the vote, China argued that the outcome suggests that the Council does not support the appointment of the new High Representative. In agreement, Russia added that the post therefore remains vacant. Other Council members maintained that the decisions of the PIC Steering Board do not require the Council’s endorsement and that abstentions were made on the basis of the resolution constraining the power of the High Representative and imposing a timeline for the closure of OHR without consideration of the “5+2” agenda, which is a set of five objectives and two conditions that need to be fulfilled prior to the OHR’s closure, that was adopted by the PIC Steering Board in 2008.

Cyprus

On 23 July, following Special Representative Elizabeth Spehar’s briefing to Council members in closed consultations on 21 July, the Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2021/13) condemning the 20 July announcement by Turkish and Turkish Cypriot leaders on the reopening of a section of Varosha and calling for the immediate reversal of this course of action and of all steps taken on Varosha since October 2020.

On 29 July, the Security Council adopted resolution 2587, renewing the mandate of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) for another six months, until 31 January 2022.

UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia

On 26 July, Special Representative and head of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) Natalia Gherman briefed Council members in consultations on UNRCCA’s activities since her last briefing in January. In this regard, she apparently discussed the situation at the Kyrgyz-Tajik border, UNRCCA’s support for transboundary water management projects, and UNRCCA’s activities pertaining to counter-terrorism.

COVID-19

On 26 July, Security Council members held closed consultations to

discuss the implementation of resolution 2565 of 26 February on the equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support Oscar Fernandez-Taranco and Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Ramesh Rajasingham briefed members at the session, which had been requested by the UK.

Sudan (Darfur)

On 27 July, the Security Council received an oral briefing on the drawdown and closure of the AU/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), as requested in resolution 2559, from Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support Atul Khare (S/PV.8825).

The Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

On 28 July, the Security Council held its quarterly open debate on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question” (S/PV.8826). The Council was briefed by Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Lynn Hastings, as well as Yudith Oppenheimer, Executive Director of Ir Amim. The representatives of Israel and the Observer State of Palestine also participated in the meeting.

Arria-formula Meeting on Counter-Terrorism and Gender

On 28 July, the Council held an Arria-formula meeting on “preventing terrorism and violent extremism through tackling gender stereotypes, masculinities, and structural gender inequality”. The meeting was organised by Mexico in cooperation with Estonia, Norway, the UK, and the US. The briefers were Assistant Secretary-General Michèle Coninx, Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate; David Duriesmith, lecturer in gender and politics at the University of Sheffield; and Fauziya Abdi Ali, President of Women in International Security Kenya.

Central African Republic

On 29 July, the Security Council adopted resolution 2588, which extended the CAR sanctions regime until 31 July 2022, including an arms embargo with some exemptions. Resolution 2588 also renewed the mandate of the CAR Panel of Experts, who assist the sanctions committee in overseeing the sanction measures, until 31 August 2022. Unlike last year’s unanimous adoption of the sanctions regime renewal, the Council adopted resolution 2588 with 14 votes in favour and one abstention (China).

Arria-formula Meeting on Myanmar

On 29 July, Security Council members held a virtual Arria-formula meeting on “Myanmar: Crisis, Conflict and COVID – where are we now?”, which was organised by the UK. The briefers were Susanna Hla Hla Soe, Minister for Women at the National Unity Government, an alliance of ousted National League for Democracy (NLD) politicians and activists, and Gum San Nsang of the Kachin Political Interim Coordination Team (KPICT), a coordination team comprised of domestic and international organisations which advocate for the rights of the Kachin ethnic groups in northern Myanmar. In addition to Council members, member states from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Bangladesh attended the meeting.

UN Peacekeeping

Expected Council Action

In August, India is organising a ministerial-level open debate on “Technology and Peacekeeping” as one of the signature events of its presidency. The open debate is expected to provide an opportunity for Council members to exchange views on the challenges and opportunities arising from the application of technology and innovation in peacekeeping. Indian Minister of External Affairs, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, will preside over the debate. Under-Secretaries-General for Peace Operations and Operational Support, Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Atul Khare, respectively, are expected to brief. A presidential statement is an anticipated outcome of the meeting.

Background and Key Recent Developments

The use of technology in peacekeeping has emerged as a new and important topic of discussion in recent years. There is growing recognition that today’s multidimensional peacekeeping operations, which are deployed in some of the most difficult and challenging security environments, cannot succeed in fulfilling their mandates without the ability to make effective use of technology, including unmanned armed aerial systems, radars, sensors, night vision and night flying capabilities, among many others.

The 2013 report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the recommendations of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping (C-34), a committee of the UN General Assembly mandated to conduct a comprehensive review of all issues relating to UN peacekeeping, acknowledged the use of technology in supporting a wide range of peacekeeping tasks related to information and communications, medical support and analysis, and reporting functions. It also said that “the use of unarmed, unmanned aerial surveillance systems can improve the situational awareness, early warning capacity and safety and security of peacekeeping missions and personnel”. The Special Committee was briefed by the relevant departments in 2013 on unmanned aerial surveillance, including legal, operational, technical, and financial considerations.

In 2014, the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support commissioned an independent panel, the Expert Panel on Technology and Innovation in Peacekeeping, to study how the use of technology can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. The panel’s final report provided important recommendations that the relevant departments have been implementing with a view to increasing the safety and security of peacekeeping personnel, improving situational awareness, enhancing field support, and facilitating mandate implementation.

The 2015 report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) similarly underscored the need to ensure “effective uptake of field appropriate technology” in support of peace operations. The HIPPO supported the use of new and enabling technologies that are field-focused, reliable and cost-effective and that can improve the safety and security of peacekeepers, enhance capabilities for early warning and protection of civilians, strengthen the health and well-being of peacekeepers, and support shelter and camp management.

Moreover, the Secretary-General’s Action for Peacekeeping Initiative (A4P), which the Secretary-General launched in March 2018, makes broad reference to the need for deploying well-trained

and well-equipped uniformed personnel and continually improving medical, technical and logistical support in peacekeeping operations to strengthen the protection of civilians and enhance the safety and security of peacekeepers. The implicit understanding is that the application of new technological tools will contribute to making a real difference in the field.

In recent years, unarmed unmanned aerial vehicles have been used in several peace operations mandated by the Council, including in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali and South Sudan. In 2016, the Security Council Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations held a discussion on the use of technology in peacekeeping, based on the recommendations of the expert panel and the HIPPO report. Former Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous said in his briefing to the working group that many of the peacekeeping tools are obsolete, underscoring the need for advances in technology and innovation in the UN’s work. At the same meeting, the Under-Secretary-General for Field Support at the time, Atul Khare, highlighted the need to reduce the carbon footprint of peacekeeping missions, for instance, through the use of solar-powered vehicles.

Key Issues and Options

One of the key issues is how to reduce the gap in, as the HIPPO report describes it, “what is readily available to and appropriate for UN peace operations and what is actually in use in the field today”. A related aspect is the need to bridge the capacity gaps among troop- and police-contributing countries in the use of technology.

As reflected in previous Council discussions in mission-specific contexts, another important issue is the ownership and confidentiality of information gathered and stored through the use of unarmed unmanned aerial vehicles.

Also important is for Council members and the wider UN membership to continue to learn about the applications of new technologies in peacekeeping and how they can be most efficiently and effectively used.

The pursuit of a presidential statement is a likely option. In this statement, the Council could take stock of the implementation of the relevant recommendations of the expert panel and the HIPPO report and draw lessons and best practices from the use of technologies in the field.

Another option that apparently is being considered by India is a separate draft resolution on the protection of peacekeepers, who have increasingly come under asymmetrical attack.

Council Dynamics

There appears to be broad consensus in the Council about holding this first thematic discussion on the use of technology in peacekeeping. While Council members support the full and effective use of technology in peacekeeping, some Council members may continue to have some reservations about the application of new technologies, including unarmed unmanned aerial surveillance systems. During this month’s meeting and negotiations, they may highlight the challenges posed by using these technologies, including the possible intrusion on the sovereignty of states and the need for host state consent in this regard. This has been a lingering issue,

UN DOCUMENTS ON PEACEKEEPING Secretary-General’s Report A/70/579 (30 November 2015) is on the implementation of recommendations of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations. Security Council Letter S/2015/446 (17 June 2015) contained letters from the Secretary-General to the Security Council, presenting the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations.

UN Peacekeeping

and members may be interested in learning from relevant UN officials about the work that has been done to put in place the necessary policy framework, mission-specific standard operating procedures

and a concept of operations for the storage and security classification of information gathered by unarmed unmanned aerial surveillance systems.

Syria

Expected Council Action

In August, 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 9 July, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2585, which renewed the Bab al-Hawa crossing on the Syrian-Turkish border for a period of six months until 10 January 2022, with an additional six months until 10 July 2022 “subject to the issuance of the Secretary General’s substantive report, with particular focus on transparency in operations, and progress on cross-line access in meeting humanitarian needs”. The Council’s unanimous adoption in favour of the text was a remarkable departure from the previous five years: the Council had not had a 15-0 vote on the cross-border mechanism since resolution 2332 in December 2016. And, unlike last year when the Council required five separate votes to renew the authorisation of the Bab al-Hawa crossing for 12 months, agreement was reached this year on a single compromise text. (Further information about the adoption of resolution 2585 and what it may mean for the Council’s work on Syria can be found in our “In Hindsight” column in this month’s Forecast).

Despite the successful renewal of the cross-border mechanism, Syria’s humanitarian situation remains precarious. Food prices have risen significantly—some 69 percent—in 2021, notwithstanding a recent decline due to the stabilisation of the Syrian pound. As such, ordinary Syrians continue to require food and nutrition assistance: according to the World Food Programme (WFP) June 2021 Country Brief, the WFP delivered food aid to over 4.9 million Syrians across the country. Of this aid, approximately 28 percent came through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing into northwest Syria.

There is also growing concern about access to water in several parts of Syria. OCHA reported to the Council in May and June about conditions that have resulted from a 60 percent decline in water flowing from the Euphrates River from Turkey into Syria, including shortages for crop irrigation and constrained capacity of dams to generate electricity. On 17 June, OCHA reported that the difficult conditions have been compounded by low levels of precipitation in Syria’s northeast this year. On 15 July, the UN announced that over one million people were at risk of losing access to safe drinking water because of worsening conditions, including war-related damage at the Alouk water station in Syria’s northeast and a lack of access for engineers to make critical repairs. According to OCHA, Syria ranks seventh on a global risk index of 191 countries that are “most at risk of a humanitarian or natural disaster event that could

overwhelm response capacity”.

Several recent high-profile incidents also continue to underline Syria’s fragile security situation. International media and humanitarian organisations both reported that artillery attacks and airstrikes from 12 to 17 July targeted civilian areas surrounding Idlib and Aleppo, killing at least 19 people; in Syria’s southwest, there are reports that the government is besieging an area occupied by the armed opposition in the city of Daraa, imperilling over 40,000 civilians.

Finally, having won 95 percent of the vote in Syria’s 26 May presidential elections, President Bashar al-Assad was sworn in for another seven-year term on 17 July. Most Council members have argued that the elections were not in conformity with resolution 2254, which calls for the creation of a new constitution for Syria and for elections to be administered under UN supervision. Meanwhile, Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen continues to pursue a political solution to the Syrian crisis, including potentially organising a sixth round of the Constitutional Committee in August and undertaking exploratory talks with key actors to establish a new international format that would allow them to take a step-by-step approach to resolve Syria’s conflict. On 19 July, Pedersen briefed Council members in closed consultations, assessing how the cooperative spirit displayed during the 9 July adoption of resolution 2585 could be parlayed into progress on the political track and the implementation of resolution 2254.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 47th session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) held an interactive dialogue on 6 July with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria. Paulo Pinheiro, Chair of the Commission, said that “the pandemic and the current economic crisis have inflicted new dimensions of suffering on Syrians”. He noted that “five international armies, their proxies and a plethora of other non-State actors continue to fight in Syria – including the air forces of the Russian Federation, the United States and Israel”. Pinheiro added that “despite the continued inadequate response at the Security Council in general, there now finally appears to be some momentum behind the establishment of a mechanism on the missing”, for which the Commission has advocated since 2016. On 13 July, the HRC adopted resolution 47/18 (A/HRC/47/L.6) by a vote of 26 in favour and six against (including Russia and China), with 15 abstentions (including India). Among other things, the resolution emphasised the need for accountability, including for crimes committed in relation to enforced disappearance. It also encouraged focused attention on the issue of missing persons.

Key Issues and Options

With the adoption of resolution 2585, the immediate future of the cross-border mechanism is no longer an urgent concern for the Council. Nonetheless, a number of humanitarian issues—such as addressing pressing humanitarian needs in Syria’s northwest and

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA Security Council Resolution S/RES/2585 (9 July 2021) renewed the authorisation for cross-border humanitarian aid into Syria through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing. **Secretary-General’s Report S/2021/583** (17 June 2021) was the regular 60-day report on the implementation of humanitarian resolutions by all parties to the conflict in Syria.

Syria

furthering progress on cross-line deliveries—will remain high on the Council’s agenda.

One area where the Council could engage more closely on this issue relates to COVID-19 vaccinations. Resolution 2585 calls on member states to “respond with practical steps to address the urgent needs of the Syrian people in light of the profound socio-economic and humanitarian impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Syria”. The Council could consider adopting a presidential statement both calling for the widespread and equitable distribution of vaccinations across Syria and urging member states to increase their contributions of vaccines to Syria as well as to the COVAX plan led by UNICEF and the World Health Organization.

Council members will also be following closely work on the political track on Syria. The need to reinvigorate the political process continues to be a key issue for the Council, especially considering the lack of progress made by the Constitutional Committee following five rounds of meetings. The Council could also use the above-mentioned presidential statement to highlight its support for the work of the Special Envoy on Syria and to call for the full and constructive engagement of all parties to the Constitutional Committee.

Council Dynamics

The adoption of resolution 2585 has been widely hailed as a rare moment of Council unity on the Syria file and an important moment in Russia-US relations, as the two permanent members reportedly collaborated closely in bilateral discussions on key elements of the text.

However, the negotiations that ultimately led to the adoption of resolution 2585 also reflected the deep divisions that have persisted on the Syria file, and particularly on the humanitarian track, over the past several years. In addition to differences about the number of border crossings to be authorised and the length of the mandate, issues such as the efficacy of cross-line deliveries, the impact of unilateral sanctions, funding of early recovery projects, and reporting requirements became key sticking points. While Council members were able to bridge differences and find compromise language on most of these issues (the impact of unilateral sanctions, not referred to in 2585, being a notable exception), these themes are likely to re-appear in upcoming Council sessions. However, building on the momentum achieved with the adoption of 2585, Council dynamics could shift towards a more positive engagement on these and other issues, with members seeking ways to cooperate.

Maritime Security

Expected Council Action

In August, the Security Council is expected to hold a high-level open debate on maritime security. The meeting will be held via videoconference (VTC). Narendra Modi, India’s prime minister, will chair the meeting. Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, the Secretary-General’s Chef de Cabinet, and Ghada Fathi Waly, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs & Crime (UNODC), are expected to brief the Council. A presidential statement is a possible outcome.

Background and Key Recent Developments

The Security Council has considered various facets of maritime security and related crimes in recent years. For over a decade, the Council has addressed the issue of piracy off the coast of Somalia, reauthorising international naval forces on a yearly basis to combat piracy in that area. Since 2011, it has also considered the issue of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. In April 2016, the Council held an open debate on piracy in the Gulf, after which it adopted a presidential statement expressing deep concern regarding the “threat that piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea pose to international peace and security”.

The Council has also focused on maritime crime in the Mediterranean region. At an open debate in November 2017 on the security challenges in the Mediterranean, Secretary-General António Guterres recognised piracy as one of several peace and security threats facing the region.

In June 2018, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, the Netherlands, and the US organised an Arria-formula meeting on

maritime crime as a threat to international peace and security. Participants discussed several forms of maritime crime, including piracy and armed robbery, arms and drug trafficking, fisheries crime, smuggling of migrants, and human trafficking.

The Council has focused particular attention on drug trafficking in the context of maritime crime. It first discussed the topic under the agenda item “Peace and Security in Africa” during an open debate in December 2009. This was followed by a briefing in February 2010 under the agenda item “Threats to International Peace and Security”, and an open debate in February 2012 and a briefing in December 2013 on the impact of drug trafficking and transnational organised crime in West Africa and in the Sahel. Several presidential statements were also adopted during this period that noted with concern the serious threats posed to international security by drug trafficking and related transnational organised crime. Five years later, in December 2018, the Council convened a meeting on “Drug Trafficking in West Africa as a threat to stability”, during which several members acknowledged the connections between maritime crime and drug trafficking. In June 2019, Council members held an Arria-formula meeting on transnational organised crime and drug trafficking as a threat to international stability, with a particular focus on the Caribbean region.

In February 2019, the Council organised its first open debate on transnational organised crime at sea as a threat to international peace and security. The debate focused on the root causes of transnational organised crime at sea, and Council members discussed means of prevention and enhanced cooperation in this regard, including

UN DOCUMENTS ON MARITIME SECURITY Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2016/4 (25 April 2016) encouraged regional states, regional organisations, and international partners to make fully operational the Gulf of Guinea counter-piracy mechanisms. **Secretary-General’s Report A/63/63** (10 March 2008) was on the oceans and the Law of the Sea. **Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8457** (5 February 2019) was a Council debate on transnational organised crime at sea. **SS/PV.7675** (25 April 2016) was an open debate on piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

Maritime Security

by addressing the links among terrorism, piracy, and trafficking of humans, weapons, and drugs. During the meeting, former UNODC Executive Director Yury Fedotov noted that transnational maritime crime had become increasingly sophisticated, expanding both the size and scope of criminal activities.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council to consider is how it can galvanise attention and effective responses to the interconnected security, economic and environmental threats posed by maritime crimes such as human and drug trafficking, transnational organised crime, and piracy.

A further important issue is how the Council can work with a broad range of actors—including national governments, local authorities, civil society and the private sector—to develop coherent and holistic responses to the threats to maritime security. While there is a robust international legal framework (the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea) in place to address transnational maritime crime, contemporary maritime security challenges have generated new mechanisms and initiatives that bridge traditional civil-military and public-private divisions, offering a new perspective on addressing maritime security.

Another key issue is whether intentional and unlawful damage to the marine environment—as well as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing—is a matter within the Council’s mandate to maintain international peace and security. In this regard, former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon maintained in his 2008 report, “Oceans and the Law of the Sea”, that such activities “can...threaten the interests of States”, while acknowledging that most definitions of “maritime security” typically focus on security from crimes at sea such as piracy, armed robbery against ships, and terrorist acts.

Depending on the deliberations, Council members may consider adopting a presidential statement reaffirming commitments to addressing maritime security in a comprehensive and holistic manner. Such a statement could:

- stress the importance of multilateral cooperation for maintaining

maritime security;

- highlight the importance of technical assistance and capacity-building at the national and regional levels on this issue;
- emphasise the need to enhance channels of communication between governments and the private sector on maritime security;
- call on member states to facilitate cooperation through the ratification and effective use of international legal frameworks; and
- identify ways to improve cooperation and coordination with regard to data collection, research and analysis, as well as judicial procedures, pertaining to maritime security.

Council Dynamics

Council members recognise that the broad range of peace and security threats related to maritime crime require coherent and effective multilateral approaches, particularly given the transnational implications of this issue. Council members, 14 of which are littoral states—only Niger has no coast—will have a particular interest in the issue, given the significance of these threats to their respective sub-regions.

There is significant consensus among Council members regarding the links among the various facets of maritime crime, such as piracy and armed robbery, and transnational organised crime. There is also strong support for strengthening cooperation and coordination in this regard. However, the Council has never addressed the issue of maritime security from a holistic perspective, which is the intention of this meeting.

The Council has previously referred to the strengthening of state institutions, economic and social development, and the respect for human rights and the rule of law as necessary conditions for the eradication of piracy and armed robbery at sea, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea. However, certain Council members may be reluctant to acknowledge the Council’s role in addressing matters they consider as further removed from maritime security and crime, such as the protection of the marine environment and the depletion of natural resources through illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

Lebanon

Expected Council Action

In August, the Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) ahead of its 31 August expiry. Prior to that, Council members will hold closed consultations on UNIFIL. Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix is the expected briefer.

Key Recent Developments

Lebanon remains without a government, almost a year after Prime Minister Hassan Diab resigned following widespread anti-government protests in the aftermath of the 4 August 2020 Beirut blast. Disagreements between Lebanese President Michel Aoun and Saad

Hariri—whom Aoun designated as the new prime minister on 22 October 2020—have reportedly been the main stumbling block in the formation of a new cabinet. On 15 July, Hariri announced his decision to step down as prime minister-designate, citing differences with Aoun.

On 26 July, Aoun named Najib Mikati—a wealthy Sunni businessman from Tripoli who had previously served as prime minister in 2005 and from 2011 to 2013—to become Lebanon’s next prime minister. Mikati received the support of 72 of the 118 members of parliament, including that of the Shi’a group Hezbollah. However, most Christian parliamentarians have not endorsed Mikati. This has led some analysts to express doubts regarding Mikati’s ability to

UN DOCUMENTS ON LEBANON [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2539](#) (28 August 2020) renewed UNIFIL’s mandate until 31 August 2021. [Secretary-General’s Reports S/2021/650](#) (13 July 2021) was on the implementation of resolution 1701. [S/2020/473](#) (1 June 2020) was an assessment of the continued relevance of UNIFIL’s resources. [Security Council Letter S/2021/625](#) (2 July 2021) was a letter from Ireland and Mexico, the Co-Chairs of the IEG on WPS of the Security Council, addressing the situation of women in Lebanon.

Lebanon

overcome sectarian differences and form a government.

The political deadlock continued to hinder progress in addressing Lebanon's multifaceted economic problems and to pursue accountability for the Beirut port explosion. Lebanese and international actors have criticised the decision by the caretaker government, which is led by Diab, not to lift the immunity of several high-ranking government and security officials to allow an investigation into their possible role in the tragedy. (In a 13 July demonstration, families of the victims of the blast called on the caretaker Interior Minister Mohamad Fahmy to lift the immunity of Major General Abbas Ibrahim, who heads the General Security Directorate.) Following Hariri's resignation, the Lebanese currency fell to a record low of approximately 21,000 Lebanese pounds to the US dollar. This compounded the difficulties faced by the civilian population, which had already been struggling to obtain basic staples. On 16 July, the French foreign ministry announced that Paris will organise an international aid conference in cooperation with the UN on 4 August to "respond to the needs of the Lebanese whose situation is deteriorating every day".

Meanwhile, international interlocutors continued to underscore the importance of conducting parliamentary and municipal elections in 2022 in line with the timeline established by the Lebanese electoral law. According to the Secretary-General's 13 July report on the implementation of resolution 1701, which called in 2006 for a cessation of hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel, Fahmy announced on 3 June that parliamentary elections would be held on either 8 or 15 May 2022 on the basis of the current electoral law, unless a new law is passed, while the municipal elections would be deferred for up to three months. In his report, covering the period from 20 February to 18 June, the Secretary-General called on the Lebanese authorities to take all steps to facilitate the timely holding of elections in 2022 and highlighted the need for clarity on measures to increase the participation of women, youth and persons with disabilities in the political process.

The situation in UNIFIL's area of operations remained volatile during the reporting period of the Secretary-General's report. That was due in part to increased tensions as a result of the round of hostilities between Israel and Hamas between 10 and 21 May. UNIFIL recorded three instances of rocket fire from southern Lebanon towards Israel between 13 and 19 May. In addition, between 14 and 25 May, UNIFIL observed several occasions when demonstrators crossed into Israeli territory during protests near the Blue Line, a border demarcation between Israel and Lebanon. On 14 May, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) responded to the crossings by firing ten single shots from assault rifles followed by rounds of automatic fire which prompted the demonstrators to return north of the Blue Line. On 20 July, two rockets were fired from Lebanon into Israeli territory and the IDF responded with artillery fire. The IDF reportedly suspects that Palestinian factions in southern Lebanon were responsible for the launches.

The Secretary-General's report noted that although UNIFIL's freedom of movement was generally maintained, the force encountered several restrictions during the reporting period. In one instance, a UNIFIL patrol following up on the report of a missile launch on 13 May was stopped by "six individuals in civilian clothes carrying automatic rifles". The report also said that in accordance with the recommendations of the Secretary-General's June 2020 report on the assessment of the continued relevance of UNIFIL resources, the

mission has begun preparatory work to install cameras in several UNIFIL positions along the Blue Line. According to the report on the implementation of resolution 1701, on four occasions between 1 and 9 April, "individuals in civilian clothes protested the preparatory works at UNIFIL positions...and threatened to use force to prevent the installation of cameras". Consequently, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) requested more time to address local concerns before the preparatory work resumes.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 47th session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) adopted the Universal Periodic Review outcome on Lebanon on 8 July without a vote (A/HRC/47/5). The president of the HRC said that out of 297 recommendations received, 179 had been supported by Lebanon.

Women, Peace and Security

The Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security (IEG) discussed the situation in Lebanon on 25 May. IEG members were briefed by Najat Rochdi, Deputy Special Coordinator for Lebanon and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, and Jack Christofides, Deputy Head of Mission for UNIFIL, who were accompanied by other members of the UN Country Team. This was the first time the IEG discussed the situation in Lebanon. At the meeting, IEG members heard an overview of recommendations on Lebanon provided by UN Women, including ways to increase women's participation in political processes and suggestions for language on women, peace and security that could be included in UNIFIL's upcoming mandate renewal.

During the meeting, it was noted that Lebanese women were prominent in leading protests calling for better living conditions in 2019, and that a group of women politicians are currently leading cross-party meetings and exchanges of ideas in an attempt to address the political impasse in the country. However, Lebanon has one of the lowest rates of women's participation in formal politics, as women constitute only 4.6 percent of the parliament and under five percent of all security institutions. UN Women recommended that Council members advocate for strengthening women's participation in conflict prevention, mediation and resolution in Lebanon, thus building on the role played locally by women in the protests and in mediation.

Key Issues and Options

The main issue for Council members in August will be the renewal of UNIFIL's mandate. Protecting the integrity of UNIFIL's mandate and providing the mission with the necessary tools to carry out its operations remain priorities for the Council. In this regard, some members may stress during the negotiations on UNIFIL's mandate renewal the need to uphold the mission's freedom of movement and its ability to investigate sites of potential violations.

An issue of increasing concern is the adverse effects of the country's dire economic situation on the ability of security forces in Lebanon, including the LAF, to maintain stability in the country. On 17 June, France convened a virtual donors' conference to mobilise aid (including food, medicine and medical equipment) for the LAF. A follow-up conference is expected in September. Council members could consider calling on international partners to fulfil their pledges from the June donors' conference and to prioritise support for the LAF in the upcoming international conferences in August and September.

Another important issue for some Council members is how best to support the participation of women in political processes in Lebanon, including in the context of the upcoming elections, and in

Lebanon

conflict prevention, mediation and resolution. In line with the recommendations presented by UN Women in the 25 May IEG meeting, members could incorporate in the upcoming UNIFIL renewal resolution language requesting the mission to support and engage with a wide range of diverse women's civil society organisations in all areas of its work. Members could also invite women from Lebanese civil society to brief in Council meetings. As noted during the IEG meeting, although the Council has asked women civil society representatives to brief the Council on various country situations since December 2016, a woman from Lebanon has yet to be invited to brief in such meetings.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity and security. As the upcoming negotiations on UNIFIL's mandate renewal will be the first during the administration of US President Joe Biden and since the advent of the five elected members in 2021, any possible new Council dynamics

on Lebanon or UNIFIL are likely to become more pronounced.

The negotiations on resolution 2539 of 28 August 2020, which most recently renewed UNIFIL's mandate, were contentious. The previous US administration strongly called for UNIFIL to play a more active role in confronting the threats posed by Iran, Hezbollah and the proliferation of weapons in southern Lebanon. As a result of the determination of the US to reduce UNIFIL's troop ceiling, resolution 2539 cut the ceiling to 13,000 troops from the 15,000 established by resolution 1701.

While the current US administration is critical of Hezbollah's role in the region, it apparently has not referred to Iran in Council meetings on Lebanon. It remains to be seen whether the US will strongly advocate for changes in UNIFIL's mandate during the upcoming negotiations. Other members—including France and Russia—oppose changing the mandate because of the potential negative impact on the fragile calm that has been maintained in southern Lebanon.

France is the penholder on Lebanon.

Somalia

Expected Council Action

In August, the Council is scheduled to be briefed on the Secretary-General's report on the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), which is due by 12 August. James Swan, Special Representative for Somalia and head of UNSOM, and Francisco Madeira, head of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), are expected to brief. Council members will also negotiate the renewal of UNSOM's mandate, which expires on 31 August.

Key Recent Developments

Somalia continues its electoral process, following months of political turmoil around technical and organisational aspects. To bridge disagreements between the government and its federal member states, Somalia's prime minister, Mohamed Hussein Roble, convened a consultative meeting between the federal government and its member states that concluded on 27 May. It resulted in the participants' renewed commitment to the implementation of the 17 September 2020 Agreement on the conduct of elections and resolved several technical disagreements regarding the composition of the electoral management bodies, the selection of Somaliland representatives, the management of elections in the Gedo region of Jubaland, and technical modalities for holding the elections. A second consultative meeting held on 29 June determined the electoral calendar; the role of a Technical Election Support Team; and halved the registration fee for women candidates. With preparations for the elections progressing, Roble, appointed on 25 July a committee entrusted with working towards achieving the target of 30% female representation in parliament.

The polls for upper house elections were eventually scheduled to take place between 25 and 27 July, but postponed, reportedly due to delays in submitting candidates' lists and in forming local

committees to cast the ballots. Puntland was the only state positioned to commence elections for four contested upper house seats and opened the ballots on 29 July. The delay caused Roble to convene the National Consultative Forum, comprised of representatives from the federal government and the federal member states, urging to conduct the upper house elections without further delay. The presidential poll is still scheduled for 10 October.

The voting is taking place in a challenging security environment. According to media reports, the leader of Al-Shabaab, Ahmed Umar Abu Ubaidah, warned against participating in the polls in a recorded audio message, reportedly referencing security challenges. Somali Security Forces, with the support of AMISOM and international partners, continue their operations to thwart the capabilities of the militant group, which still operates across several regions of the country. One of the group's recent attacks, conducted on 10 July, claimed the lives of some ten people and injured several others when a bomb exploded in Mogadishu. It was reportedly intended to kill the police commissioner. On 20 July, the US, in conjunction with Somali forces, conducted an airstrike against Al-Shabaab near the city of Galkayo, following attacks by the group on US-supported Somali security forces (a particular contingent referred to as "Danab forces"). The airstrike was the first since the Biden administration took office on 20 January; US drone activity had also declined pending the revision of its policy regarding the use of drones in conflict settings; the Department of Defense maintained that the airstrike was carried out in support of Somali partner forces and thus congruent with the policies in place. A second airstrike targeting Al-Shabaab took place on 23 July close to Qeycad.

On the humanitarian side, OCHA reported in its update on 14 July that the funding situation is "the worst in six years", hindering

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOMALIA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2568 (12 March 2021) renewed the AMISOM authorisation until 31 December 2021. S/RES/2540 (28 August 2020) extended UNSOM's mandate for 12 months until 31 August 2021. **Secretary-General's Report** S/2021/485 (19 May 2021) was the Secretary-General's report on the situation in Somalia covering the developments from 10 February to 7 May 2021.

Somalia

the humanitarian community in assisting some 5.9 million persons in need. Natural disasters and conflict caused the internal displacement of some 2.9 million people, and a further 2.8 million are projected to face acute food insecurity by September.

The August briefing will precede negotiations on the UNSOM mandate, which expires on 31 August. It was last renewed on 28 August 2020 by resolution 2540. The text emphasised the role of UNSOM in supporting the Federal Government through the provision of strategic advice, good offices, capacity-building, and coordination of international support, including for elections. Its mandate is described as complementary to the mandates of AMISOM, the UN Country Team, and the support provided by the international community.

References to AMISOM in the mandate are likely to be the subject of discussion during the negotiation process. The AU has recently conducted an independent assessment of AMISOM. The assessment team apparently evaluated several options for the future of the AU mission, including:

- the establishment of an AU-UN Multidimensional Stabilisation Mission in Somalia;
- an AU Multidimensional Stabilisation Support Mission to Somalia, which would constitute a reconfiguration of AMISOM;
- the deployment of the East African Standby Force; and
- an AMISOM exit followed by the assumption of security responsibilities by the Somali Security Forces (SSF) under the Somali Transition Plan.

In its report, the team is said to have recommended the establishment of an AU-UN Multidimensional Stabilisation Mission to Somalia as the preferred option for consideration when the reauthorisation of AMISOM is discussed by the Council in December.

The AU assessment follows an independent assessment of AMISOM commissioned by the UN, which was submitted to the Security Council on 8 January. The UN report also evaluated the possibility of an AU-UN hybrid mission but concluded by recommending continued AU engagement through a reconfigured AMISOM. Such a reconfiguration would include a new concept of operations and a transition of AMISOM to a new African-led support mission. In reaction to the findings of the AU assessment, the Somali government has objected to replacing AMISOM with a hybrid mission. It appears to prefer a direct transition of security responsibilities from the AU mission to Somali security forces without a new international mission in the interim.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is how it can support UNSOM in continuing

to assist Somalia in its electoral process.

A broader issue for the Council is how to support ongoing stabilisation and peacebuilding efforts in the country.

In renewing the UNSOM mandate, the Council could consider including language that:

- welcomes the outcome of the consultative process on outstanding issues related to the elections;
- calls on the Somali political stakeholders to remain constructive in their engagement throughout the electoral process, to deliver on their agreed commitments, to swiftly organise the upper house elections in all federal member states, and to resolve any issue that may arise through dialogue; and
- updating language about the challenging humanitarian situation and with the findings of the Secretary-General's 6 May report on children and armed conflict, which identified Somalia as one of the countries with the highest number of grave violations, mostly owing to recruitment and use by Al-Shabaab.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Although resolution 2540 was adopted unanimously, language regarding human rights, climate change, and the rule of law sparked differing views during negotiations. Another difficult issue was the suggestion to add reporting requirements on the UN's Human Rights Due Diligence Policy across all United Nations support to AMISOM and the Somali security sector; no agreement was reached on this matter, and the reference was omitted.

Divisions also persist regarding the future set-up and financing of AMISOM. The last authorisation of the mission was adopted unanimously, but in a joint explanation of vote, the "A3 plus one" (Kenya, Niger, Tunisia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) expressed disappointment over the omission of a reference to UN assessed contributions as an option to be examined for future financial support.

With the renewal of the AMISOM authorisation coming up on December, there may be increasing interest among members in assessing progress towards the implementation of the Somalia Transition Plan, which outlines the strategic and operational objectives for the progressive transfer of security responsibilities from AMISOM to the Somali security institutions by 2023.

The UK is the penholder on Somalia, and Ireland chairs the 751 Somalia sanctions committee.

Counter-Terrorism

Expected Council Action

In August, the Security Council is expected to receive briefings from Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov, the head of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), and Assistant Secretary-General Michèle Coninx, the Executive Director of the

Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), on the Secretary-General's 13th strategic-level report on the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da'esh). India's Minister of External Affairs, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, is expected to chair the meeting.

UN DOCUMENTS ON COUNTER-TERRORISM Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2021/1 (12 January 2021) was on the 20th anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1373 and the establishment of the CTC. **Secretary-General's Report S/2021/98** (29 January 2021) was the Secretary-General's 12th biannual strategic-level report on the threat posed by ISIL. **Sanctions Committee Document S/2021/655** (15 July 2021) contained the 28th report of the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee's Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team. **General Assembly Document A/RES/75/291** (30 June 2021) approved the seventh review of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Counter-Terrorism

Key Recent Developments

In June, CTED published a second update to its June 2020 report titled “The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on terrorism, countering terrorism and countering violent extremism”. The first update was published in December 2020. The second update documents information gathered by CTED during its ongoing dialogue with international and regional organisations and member states, including information obtained during hybrid assessment visits that CTED is currently conducting on behalf of the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC). It is also informed by data collected during a survey of CTED’s partners that sought their views regarding the potential long-term impacts of the pandemic.

The updated CTED report focuses on the challenges that the pandemic poses to addressing the root causes of terrorism and violent extremism, an increase in recruitment opportunities for terrorist groups, and the situation of ISIL-associated foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and their families. It also considers the ways in which terrorist groups have exploited the pandemic; the difficulties the pandemic has created for implementation of prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration (PRR) measures; and trends that are affecting specific member states and regions.

CTED’s report notes that pandemic-related economic hardships—such as rising unemployment, growing poverty and inequality, and increasing food insecurity—are potential drivers of an increased terrorist threat. It also argues that the difficulties encountered by states in addressing economic challenges, together with social frustration regarding COVID-19 restrictions, could lead to increased governance-related competition between states and terrorist groups. The report explains that several terrorist groups are already exploiting the pandemic both to cultivate their authority and legitimacy and expand their recruitment and radicalisation tactics by providing charity, food, monetary resources, and other related forms of support.

CTED also considers the impact that the pandemic has had on education. The pandemic has restricted access to education for children in many states, placing them at increased risk of being recruited by terrorist groups. According to CTED, lack of access to education can weaken young people’s ability to resist the discourse of violent extremists.

Regarding the situation of FTFs associated with ISIL and their families, CTED’s report states that the pandemic has exacerbated already difficult conditions in the detention camps in Iraq and Syria that house women and children affiliated with ISIL. The populations living in these camps face an increased risk of health complications arising from the pandemic and are also considered more susceptible to radicalisation. In his previous report on the threat posed by ISIL, the Secretary-General referred to cases of radicalisation and fundraising in the al-Hawl camp in north-eastern Syria. Regarding the implementation of PRR measures, the CTED report notes that continued COVID-19 restrictions might prevent civil society organisations or local stakeholders from supporting or engaging with individuals who are due to be reintegrated, and that this could delay the progress of these programmes and lead to a decreased likelihood of positive outcomes.

CTED’s report concludes by noting that although there is limited evidence of a clear correlation between the pandemic and the nature or intensity of terrorist violence, the pandemic is “likely to have increased the underlying drivers and structural factors that are often

conducive to terrorism”. It argues that it is essential for counter-terrorism to remain a top priority for the international community, as many states facing significant resource challenges are reliant on bilateral or multilateral support for their counter-terrorism measures.

On 30 June, the General Assembly adopted a resolution approving the seventh review of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The review, which takes place every two years, was originally scheduled for 2020 but was delayed because of the pandemic. The negotiations concerning this review are traditionally contentious, and the repatriation of ISIL-affiliated individuals and families from detention camps in Syria and Iraq and references to violent far-right groups and right-wing terrorism were particularly polarising issues during the negotiations. Although the resolution was adopted unanimously, the compromises that were reached reflect divisions among member states.

The 28th report of the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, which was published on 21 July, states that there was broad continuity in the nature and source of the threats posed by ISIL during the first half of 2021, together with heightened threats in some regions. In this regard, the report notes that “[t]he most striking development of the period under review was the emergence of Africa as the region most affected by terrorism”. In West and East Africa, for example, ISIL affiliates gained supporters and increased the amount of territory under direct threat from attack, while also increasing their fundraising and weapons capabilities. The report also notes that ISIL has evolved into an entrenched insurgency in Iraq and Syria, where it exploits weaknesses in local security to find safe havens and target forces engaged in counter-ISIL operations. The Monitoring Team expressed particular concern about the situation in camps for internally displaced persons in Syria and argued that delays in the processing, rehabilitation and reintegration of residents increase the risk that they will be radicalised. In Central, South and South-East Asia, ISIL affiliates continue to be active despite key leadership losses and sustained pressure from security forces. According to the report, ISIL has between \$25 million and \$50 million in available funds, which represents a decline from the hundreds of millions it once had access to.

Council members held a virtual Arria-formula meeting on “the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism” on 16 June. The meeting was organised by Tunisia in cooperation with Estonia, France, Ireland, Kenya, Niger, Norway, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the UK, and Viet Nam. The briefers were Coninx; Edmund Fitton-Brown, Coordinator of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee and of the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee; and Eelco Kessels, Executive Director of the Global Center on Cooperative Security.

Council Dynamics

In general, counter-terrorism enjoys the support of all Council members. A recent notable exception was a draft resolution on the prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of FTFs. Initiated by Indonesia in August 2020, it failed to be adopted because of a US veto; the other 14 Council members voted in favour of the text. The US argued that the draft resolution should not be adopted because it did not refer to the repatriation of FTFs and their families.

Counter-Terrorism

Some differences exist regarding the four pillars of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The pillars are, first, addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; second, measures to prevent and combat terrorism; third, measures to build states' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the UN system in that regard; and fourth, measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism. The fourth pillar does not enjoy equal support among all Council members. Some members

favour a counter-terrorism approach that is founded in human rights, prevention and the involvement of civil society, while other members focus more closely on security and law enforcement.

The US is the penholder on counter-terrorism. Ambassador Tarek Ladeb (Tunisia) chairs the CTC. Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative Trine Heimerback (Norway) chairs the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee. The 1540 Non-Proliferation Committee is chaired by Ambassador Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico).

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In August, the Council is expected to hold its monthly briefing on Yemen with a representative of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths. General Abhijit Guha, head of the UN Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) and chair of the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC), is expected to brief in consultations. Also in August, the Yemen 2140 Sanctions Committee is expected to meet with the Yemen Panel of Experts to discuss the panel's mid-term update.

Key Recent Developments

Fighting continued in Yemen during July amid stalled ceasefire negotiations. The Houthi rebel group offensive to take Marib governorate from the Yemeni government remains halted outside of Marib City. In early July, forces affiliated with the government launched an operation against the Houthis to re-take the central al-Bayda governorate. However, much of the government's initial gains were soon reversed.

Tensions have been escalating between the government and the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC), undermining the power-sharing accord known as the Riyadh Agreement that Saudi Arabia brokered in 2019 following fighting between these nominal allies, both of whom oppose the Houthis. In mid-March, protesters stormed Aden's Ma'shiq palace, where Prime Minister Ma'een Abdulmalik Saeed had been headquartered since Yemen's unity government, formed in accordance with the Riyadh Agreement, returned to Aden, Yemen's interim capital, in late December 2020. Following this incident, Ma'een and some members of his cabinet left Aden and have since been based in Riyadh. On 26 June, the STC announced that it was suspending communication with the other parties to the Riyadh Agreement following clashes the previous day, when the government prevented STC supporters from protesting in Shabwa governorate.

Saudi Arabia oversaw a meeting of the two sides in Riyadh on 1 July. In a statement, Saudi Arabia announced that the two parties agreed to end all forms of escalation and called for the government and STC to avoid conflict and implement the Riyadh Agreement. Tensions remained high, however, as the government and STC amassed forces and clashed in Abyan governorate soon after the meeting.

In early July, the value of Yemen's currency fell below 1,000 Yemeni riyals to one US dollar for the first time in areas controlled

by the government. For Yemen, which imports most of its food and other critical goods, the currency crisis has been a major driver of the country's humanitarian crisis, including heightening the risk of famine as Yemenis struggle to afford food. Meanwhile, the riyal was trading at about 600 riyals to the dollar in Houthi-controlled areas.

On 14 July, the Council adopted resolution 2586, renewing the mandate of UNMHA until 15 July 2022. The resolution also reiterated the Council's call for the parties to work towards stabilising Hodeidah, the strategic Red Sea port city, including through cooperation in the RCC, and expressed support for UNMHA's efforts to reactivate the RCC and its joint mechanisms to implement the December 2019 Hodeidah agreement that established a ceasefire in Hodeidah city and governorate. It further demanded an end to the obstruction of movement of UNMHA personnel in Hodeidah governorate and expressed support for UNMHA's efforts to meet the access needs of all parties and to be equally responsive to their requests.

Following the adoption of resolution 2586, Council members held consultations on Yemen with Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo, Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Ramesh Rajasingham, and General Guha. The UN is expected soon to announce a new UN Special Envoy to Yemen to succeed Martin Griffiths, who started at OCHA in July, but at the time of writing, it had yet to do so.

Key Issues and Options

The key issues continue to be the need to achieve a ceasefire and to resume a peace process. Despite intensified negotiations this year, ceasefire talks have stalled, with the Houthis taking the position that Sana'a airport should be opened and restrictions on Hodeidah's ports lifted before they will discuss a ceasefire. The government has sought to agree on and implement these measures together as a package, which is also in line with UN proposals to date. Sustaining the Saudi Arabia-brokered Riyadh Agreement is another important issue, critical for preventing the conflict's further deterioration. A related issue is a new UN envoy developing his or her ideas or vision for a political process that the Council can back.

Yemen continues to be the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with 20.7 million people in need of some form of humanitarian assistance or protection. Key issues related to the humanitarian crisis include the protection of civilians, humanitarian access, funding for the

UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2586](#) (14 July 2021) renewed the mandate of UNMHA until 15 July 2022. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8797](#) (15 June 2021) was Special Envoy Martin Griffiths' final briefing on Yemen. [S/PV.8786](#) (3 June 2021) was a briefing on the FSO Safer oil tanker.

Yemen

aid operation, and support for the economy. The UN has repeatedly warned about the potential for the Houthis' Marib offensive to worsen the humanitarian crisis if it triggers a new wave of mass displacement as there are over one million internally displaced persons in the governorate who have fled from other conflict areas.

Another key issue is the threat posed by the FSO Safer oil tanker moored in the Red Sea off the Houthi-held Ras Isa oil terminal. The UN has been negotiating unsuccessfully with the Houthis to allow a technical team to conduct an assessment mission and make initial repairs to the decrepit ship, which risks causing an environmental catastrophe in the event of an oil spill or fire.

Council members could issue a press statement, as they often do after meetings on Yemen, to call for:

- a ceasefire;
- measures to address the humanitarian crisis, such as for Yemen's partners to inject foreign reserves into the Central Bank;
- the continued implementation of the Riyadh Agreement; and
- the Houthis to cooperate with the UN to avert a crisis with the Safer oil tanker.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members are, for the most part, united on Yemen. They support UN-led mediation efforts and share concerns about the humanitarian situation and the environmental threat posed by the Safer oil tanker. The US lent new momentum earlier this year to UN efforts to negotiate a ceasefire after it appointed a US Special Envoy for Yemen, Timothy Lenderking, in February. European members and the US tend to be more critical of Houthi obstructionism, while Russia is more cautious in singling out the Houthis—a dynamic that has sometimes played out this year during negotiations on Council products.

Outside the Council, Saudi Arabia announced a ceasefire proposal in March along the lines of the UN's plan, and Oman has reportedly continued its efforts to broker a ceasefire since taking on a stronger mediation role in June.

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

Iraq

Expected Council Action

In August, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing from the Special Representative and head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, on the most recent developments in Iraq and the Secretary-General's two upcoming reports concerning UNAMI and missing Kuwaiti property and missing third party and Kuwaiti nationals. Both reports are due in August. The briefing will be followed by closed consultations.

Key Recent Developments

Tensions have risen in Iraq in the lead-up to the parliamentary elections scheduled for 10 October, stemming particularly from domestic unrest and an exchange of attacks between militias and US-led forces. On 6 June, two drones were shot down above al-Asad airbase in western Iraq, which is currently housing US troops, by the US military's C-RAM defence system. Earlier on the same day, a rocket above Baghdad airport was also shot down by the US military. On 9 June, there were two separate attacks on Iraqi military bases hosting US-led coalition troops and US contractors. The first of these attacks targeted a military base near Baghdad airport, using drones laden with explosives. In the second attack, three rockets struck Balad airbase, which is used by the US company Sallyport to service F-16 fighter jets flown by the Iraqi air force. There were no casualties in either attack.

On 26 June, the US carried out airstrikes in Iraq and Syria. The strikes targeted two Iranian-backed militias, Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada and Kata'ib Hezbollah, which the Pentagon blamed for organising drone strikes against US personnel in Iraq. Seven militia fighters were killed and at least six more were wounded during the

raids, which also sparked an exchange of fire between the militias and US-led forces in eastern Syria. In a 29 June letter to the Council, the US noted that the airstrikes were intended to deter Iran and Iran-backed militia groups "from conducting or supporting further attacks on [US] personnel or facilities". On 7 July, 14 rockets struck the al-Asad airbase, resulting in minor injuries to two US personnel. On the same day, a drone attack targeted Erbil airport in the Kurdish region of Iraq. Although the attack was aimed at the US base on the airport's grounds, it reportedly caused no damage and there were no casualties. The following day, two rockets were fired at the US embassy in Baghdad. One was diverted by the embassy's rocket defence system while the second fell near the perimeter of Baghdad's Green Zone, an area in central Baghdad that includes the US embassy. On 19 July, a roadside bomb attack in Baghdad killed at least 25 people and wounded 50 others.

The recent spate of attacks on US interests has increased the pressure on Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi to expel the US military from Iraq. Following a 15 July meeting in Baghdad with Brett McGurk, the White House's coordinator for Middle East policy, al-Kadhimi's office issued a statement indicating that they had discussed "mechanisms for withdrawing combat forces from Iraq and moving to a new phase of strategic cooperation". During a 26 July meeting with al-Kadhimi, US President Joe Biden announced that the US combat mission in Iraq would conclude by the end of 2021. He also said, however, that the US military would continue to work with Iraqi forces in their fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and that US troops will "be available to continue to train, to assist, to help and to deal with [ISIL]". According to US officials, the announcement will not lead to a significant

UN DOCUMENTS ON IRAQ Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2576 (27 May 2021) renewed the mandate of UNAMI until 27 May 2022. S/RES/2544 (18 September 2020) renewed the mandate of UNITAD until 18 September 2021. Security Council Letter S/2021/614 (29 June 2021) was from US ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield concerning the US airstrikes in Iraq and Syria on 26 June.

Iraq

reduction in the number of US troops in Iraq or a fundamental change in their mission.

Preparations for the October elections have been disrupted by Shi'a leader Muqtada al-Sadr's 15 July announcement that he is withdrawing his support for the current government and will not participate in the polls. Al-Sadr currently controls the largest bloc in the Iraqi parliament. In announcing his withdrawal, al-Sadr stated that Iraq was being subjected to a "satanic regional scheme to humiliate the country and bring it to its knees" and warned Iraqis not to "sell your homeland to the corrupt at any price"; some analysts have speculated, however, that al-Sadr is withdrawing in order to distance himself from the troubles that have plagued Iraq in recent months. In the aftermath of his announcement, hundreds of al-Sadr's supporters across the country burned their electoral cards to demonstrate that they intend to boycott the elections. This development has further complicated efforts to build public confidence in the polls. Those efforts had already been hampered by attacks on activists connected to the protests that formed part of the Tishreen movement, which began in October 2019 and led to the elections being called. In an effort to bolster public confidence in the elections, the EU announced on 21 June that it will send election observers to Iraq to monitor the polls.

Protests have continued to sweep Iraq in recent months. On 25 May, demonstrators gathered in Baghdad's Tahir Square to demand accountability for attacks that have reportedly targeted more than 70 activists involved with the Tishreen movement through assassinations, attempted murders and abductions, seemingly with impunity. One protestor was killed and dozens more were injured during these protests. Similar protests took place on 18 July, when hundreds of Iraqis assembled in Baghdad to call for accountability for the murders of civil society activists. In early July, significant demonstrations in reaction to widespread power outages erupted in Baghdad and cities in Iraq's southern provinces, including Basra, where protesters gathered in front of the main electricity company's office to demand better service. Demonstrators also took to the streets in Nasiriya to protest government corruption following a fire that tore through the

COVID-19 ward of a local hospital, which resulted in 92 deaths and more than 100 injuries.

Human Rights Related Developments

On 12 May, the UN Human Rights Office and UNAMI issued a report that found that freedom of expression in the Kurdish region of Iraq was increasingly curtailed in the previous year. The report documented a pattern of targeting people for reporting on or criticising the actions of public authorities. The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, noted that the "the pattern of repression documented in this report is deeply worrying, highlighting not only the threats and intimidation of critics, but also the chilling effect such actions can have on others seeking transparency and to hold public authorities to account". The report called on the regional authorities to take immediate steps to fully protect the right to freedom of expression and to end harassment, intimidation and reprisals against journalists, human rights defenders, and activists.

Key Issues and Options

Council members are following the political, security and humanitarian situations in Iraq closely. Following the briefing from Henniss-Plasschaert, Council members could issue a press statement addressing issues of concern to them, such as the importance of curtailing violence, promoting accountability and laying the groundwork for peaceful and fair elections.

Council and Wider Dynamics

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

Regional dynamics continue to affect Iraq, as demonstrated by the recent attacks on US personnel and contractors and the US response to those attacks. The Iraqi government routinely states that it does not wish to become a theatre for Iran-US tensions. Turkey continues to conduct military operations against Kurdish positions in northern Iraq, despite Iraq's objections.

The US is the penholder on Iraq issues in general, and the UK is the penholder on Iraqi-Kuwaiti issues and the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD). Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia) is the chair of the 1518 Iraq 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 regarding the committee's work. The brief is likely to focus on recent developments in the DPRK and the implementation of the sanctions regime.

Key Recent Developments

Shortly after US President Joe Biden took office in January, his administration announced that it would conduct a full review of US policy towards the DPRK. In April, the administration indicated its new strategy would involve pursuing a middle ground between former President Donald Trump's direct outreach to DPRK leader Kim Jong-un—which sought to agree on a comprehensive deal

encompassing the end of the Korean war, denuclearisation and a new relationship between Pyongyang and Washington—and the "strategic patience" approach adopted by former President Barack Obama, which tried to compel the DPRK to negotiate regarding its nuclear program by imposing sanctions and other forms of pressure.

On 30 April, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said that the US was seeking complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and indicated that the administration's policy "calls for a calibrated, practical approach that is open to and will explore diplomacy with the DPRK, and to make practical progress that increases the security of the [US], our allies, and deployed forces".

The contours of the Biden administration's policy toward the DPRK became clearer following a 21 May meeting between President Biden and Republic of Korea (ROK) President Moon Jae-in. In a joint statement following the meeting, the two leaders emphasised

DPRK (North Korea)

their shared commitment to complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and called for the full implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions. They also reaffirmed the importance of diplomacy and dialogue and noted that talks regarding denuclearisation and the establishment of permanent peace should be based on previous commitments, including the Panmunjom Declaration and the Singapore Joint Statement. The Panmunjom Declaration was adopted by the DPRK and the ROK during the 2018 inter-Korean summit. It states that both countries share the common goal of realising a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula and notes that they have agreed to actively seek the support and cooperation of the international community to realise this goal. The Singapore Joint Statement was signed during a bilateral summit between the US and the DPRK, which also took place in 2018. It calls for a new relationship between the DPRK and the US, lasting peace in Korea, complete denuclearisation, and recovery of the remains of prisoners of war and soldiers who are missing in action.

During a press conference following the 21 May meeting, Biden announced that Sung Kim, a former US ambassador to the ROK and the Philippines and the current US ambassador to Indonesia, would be appointed as US Special Representative for the DPRK. Biden also said he will not meet with Kim Jong-un until Kim makes a commitment to eliminate the DPRK's nuclear weapons.

In a 17 June meeting of the Workers' Party of Korea (Workers' Party), Kim ordered the DPRK government to prepare for both dialogue and confrontation with the US. Following a subsequent trilateral meeting of the US, Japan and the ROK that was held on 21 June, Sung Kim indicated that he would be willing to meet with the DPRK "anywhere, anytime, without preconditions". During this meeting, he urged Council members to continue implementing all Council resolutions addressing the DPRK and noted that the US will do the same. In an apparent rebuke to Sung Kim, Kim Jong-un's sister, Kim Yo-jong, issued a statement on 22 June in which she appeared to suggest that the US will be "disappoint[ed]" if it expects talks regarding the DPRK's nuclear weapons program to resume. The following day, the DPRK's Minister of Foreign Affairs formally rejected Sung Kim's offer.

A widespread food crisis appears to be looming in the DPRK. On 16 June, state news media reported that Kim Jong-un advised the Central Committee of the Workers' Party that "the people's food situation is now getting tense as the agricultural sector failed to fulfil its grain production....[I]t is essential for the whole party and state to concentrate on farming". In a 14 June report, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization forecast that the DPRK will experience an "uncovered food gap...equivalent to approximately 2.3 months of food use" this year. The report also noted that "households could experience [a] harsh lean period between August and October 2021" if this gap is not covered by commercial imports or aid. Analysts have speculated that the food shortage may prompt the DPRK to begin nuclear talks with the US in order to secure food aid.

DPRK state media have also reported that Kim recently advised the Workers' Party Politburo that there have been lapses in the DPRK's COVID-19 response that have caused a "great crisis" and may result in "grave consequences". These reports did not clarify whether this means the DPRK is experiencing an outbreak of

COVID-19. In response, a spokesperson for China's Foreign Ministry offered to provide help "if any is needed". Although the DPRK maintains that there are no cases of COVID-19 in the country, its economy has been hit hard by the pandemic. In August 2020, Kim publicly acknowledged that his five-year economic plan had failed and instructed officials to undertake an "arduous march" to overcome economic difficulties.

On 11 July, which was the 60th anniversary of the mutual defence treaty between China and the DPRK, Kim and Chinese President Xi Jinping exchanged messages reaffirming their commitment to bilateral cooperation between the two countries. According to media reports, at least one DPRK-flagged bulk carrier linked to coal exports and three DPRK-flagged cargo ships are believed to have made voyages to the Chinese port Longkou during July. In its most recent report, published on 4 March, the Panel of Experts found that a DPRK vessel offloaded coal and collected humanitarian aid at this port in 2020.

Key Issues and Options

The DPRK's non-compliance with Council resolutions remains an ongoing issue. In its 4 March report, the Panel of Experts noted that the DPRK has continued to violate a range of sanctions imposed by the Council, including by developing its nuclear and ballistic missile programs and importing refined petroleum products via illicit ship-to-ship transfers and direct deliveries. The DPRK's refusal to engage with the US' recent diplomatic outreach is also an issue, as is the overall effectiveness of the sanctions regime. Although the regime has been in place for a number of years, the DPRK is widely believed to have increased the number of nuclear weapons it holds during that time.

The Council could consider convening 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 calling for member states to adhere to the existing sanctions regime and the resumption of diplomatic talks.

The impact of sanctions on the humanitarian situation in the DPRK is a particular concern for some Council members. If the looming food crisis worsens and the "great crisis" that Kim referred to turns out to be an outbreak of COVID-19, there could be increasing pressure for the Council to consider options for temporary and targeted sanctions relief that might mitigate the humanitarian impact of these developments.

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 policy of maximum pressure until the DPRK takes concrete steps towards denuclearisation. EU members of the Council are generally supportive of this approach. China and Russia, on the other hand, have shown interest in implementing 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.

DPRK (North Korea)

Council members are 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 of considering humanitarian exemptions.

The revised US policy towards the DPRK may have an impact

on Council dynamics, particularly if the DPRK decides to re-engage in diplomatic talks with the US. Although the DPRK has so far refused to do so, this could change if food shortages in the country worsen.

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

Mali

Expected Council Action

In August, the Council is expected to renew the Mali asset freeze and travel ban sanctions, which expire on 31 August, and the mandate of the Mali Panel of Experts, which expires on 30 September. Council members are further expected to consider the Secretary-General's 15 July report with recommendations on the force level of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). The mandate of MINUSMA expires on 30 June 2022.

Key Recent Developments

On 29 June, the Council adopted resolution 2584, which renewed the mandate of MINUSMA for one year. The new mandate updated MINUSMA's primary strategic priority to include supporting Mali's political transition to restore an elected government following two coups d'état in August 2020 and in May. The Council further called on all Malian stakeholders to facilitate the resumption and full realisation of the transition and handover of power to elected civilian authorities, reaffirming the need to respect the 18-month transition period and the 27 February 2022 date set for the presidential and legislative elections.

In light of the growing level of insecurity and physical violence against civilians in central Mali, resolution 2584 requested a Secretary-General's report by 15 July on progress in implementing MINUSMA's force adaptation plan and recommendations on force levels and the ceiling of MINUSMA's uniformed personnel. The Secretary-General submitted his report on 15 July, proposing an increase in MINUSMA's authorised force ceiling by 2,069 uniformed personnel—1,730 military personnel, 300 formed police unit personnel and 39 individual police officers. (The mission's current ceiling is 13,289 military personnel and 1,920 police.)

The report said that the increase would enhance MINUSMA's ability to protect civilians in central Mali and create further space for the peace process in the north. It said, however, that MINUSMA will not be able to make a sustained difference absent a strong and coherent vision on the part of the government and a reinforced presence of the Malian state. According to the report, an expansion in the mission's authorised strength should be accompanied by a Malian-led, clearly articulated stabilisation vision and strategy to protect civilians.

Mali remains suspended from the AU and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) following its second coup d'état in a nine-month period when military officials ousted the country's

transitional authorities on 24 May. Colonel Assimi Göita, who led both coups and had been serving as transitional vice-president, was sworn in as Mali's new transitional president on 7 June. That same day, in accordance with ECOWAS' request, Göita appointed a civilian prime minister, Choguel Maïga. On 11 June, Maïga formed a new government comprising 28 members, with the military keeping the strategic ministries of defence, security and national reconciliation. In a potentially positive step, Maïga announced on 11 July that he supported the formation of a single electoral body, *Organe unique de gestion des élections*, to replace Mali's discredited election architecture. Despite the calls for a more streamlined electoral management system, some political parties and civil society groups raised concerns that the new body could be used to extend the transition period or strengthen the military's control over the electoral process.

On 20 July, Göita was the target of an assassination attempt during prayers at the Grand Mosque in Bamako for the holiday of Eid al-Adha. Göita was unhurt when a man lunged at Göita with a knife, according to an AFP journalist who witnessed the incident. On 25 July, the government reported that the man had died in custody.

On 28 June, France announced that after consultations with the transitional authorities and regional countries, it would resume joint military operations and advisory missions with Malian forces, which France suspended following the 24 May coup. Meanwhile, terrorist groups continue to launch attacks in northern and central Mali. On 25 June, 13 MINUSMA peacekeepers—12 from Germany and one from Belgium—were wounded, three seriously, in a car bomb attack targeting a temporary base set up by the peacekeepers in Mali's northern Gao region. Also that day, six Malian soldiers were killed and one wounded in an attack on a military outpost in Boni in Mali's central Mopti region. On 21 June, six French soldiers and four civilians were injured in a car bomb attack in the Timbuktu region.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 29 June statement, High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet expressed deep concern over the rise in human rights violations and abuses in Mali since August 2020. According to the statement, there were attacks over the previous six months by groups such as the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), as well as violence across communal lines, all resulting in civilian casualties. MINUSMA's Human Rights and Protection Division recorded 617 human rights abuses, including 165 killings by armed groups, from January to June, representing an increase of about 37 per cent compared to August to December 2020, the statement said.

UN DOCUMENTS ON MALI [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2584](#) (29 June 2021) renewed the mandate of MINUSMA until 30 June 2022. [S/RES/2541](#) (31 August 2020) renewed the Mali sanctions regime for an additional year. [Secretary-General's Report S/2021/657](#) (16 July 2021) recommended increasing MINUSMA's force ceiling by 2,069 uniformed personnel. [Security Council Letter S/2021/628](#) (6 July 2021) contained the communiqué of the 43rd session of the Follow-up Committee on the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali emanating from the Algiers process, held in Bamako on 29 June 2021. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8809](#) (29 June 2021) contained explanations of votes at the adoption of resolution 2584 renewing MINUSMA. [S/PV.8794](#) (14 June 2021) was a briefing on Mali.

Mali

Sanctions-related Developments

The 2374 Committee met on 23 July to discuss the Mali Panel of Experts' final report. Among its findings, the final report, which is not yet available publicly, apparently sets out how the implementation of the 2015 Mali Peace and Reconciliation Agreement has been slowed by the political developments of the past year.

Women, Peace and Security

On 17 June, the Women's Observatory for Political Participation, Peace and Reconciliation in Mali (Observatoire des femmes pour la participation politique, la paix et la réconciliation au Mali) was launched in Bamako. The observatory is aimed at strengthening women's participation in the Malian political process as well as in the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement.

The launch was attended by women from the Agreement Monitoring Committee, the National Transition Council and the Cadre de Concertation des Femmes des Partis Politiques. Also in attendance were UN officials, including Special Representative for Mali and head of MINUSMA El-Ghassim Wane, and members of civil society organisations. Among the key proposals agreed during the meeting was the inclusion of missions to monitor the peace agreement's implementation in the Malian regions within the mandate of the observatory.

In his 1 June report on Mali, the Secretary-General had urged the government and the armed groups who signed the peace agreement to "increase ownership of the peace process, including by taking further steps to enhance the participation of women". The observatory emerged from the recommendations of a January 2020 national workshop on women's participation in the implementation of the peace agreement, in which 200 women participated from the ten regions of Mali and the Bamako district. The workshop was facilitated by MINUSMA and UN Women.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for Council members will be to assess and renew the Mali sanctions measures established in 2017 to increase pressure on the signatory parties of the 2015 Mali Peace and Reconciliation Agreement to speed up its implementation. Another key issue for Council members during August will be to consider the Secretary-General's report on MINUSMA's force levels in light of the deteriorating security situation in central Mali. Progress in Mali's political transition remains an underlying concern as it has diverted attention from implementing the peace agreement and tackling the country's security challenges.

In renewing the Mali sanctions, the resolution could address issues that the Panel of Experts final report reportedly raises, such as child labour in artisanal gold mines, sexual violence and the possible designation of entities owned or partly owned by sanctioned individuals. Consideration could be given to expanding the designation criteria to include obstruction of the political transition.

Council members may begin discussions on authorising the Secretary-General's proposed increase in the force ceiling, which could include approving up to 2,069 new personnel. If the Council authorises additional peacekeepers, it may further reiterate the need for Malian authorities to develop and follow through with a comprehensive strategy to stabilise the centre and protect civilians.

Council Dynamics

During Council negotiations to renew MINUSMA, France proposed increasing the mission's force levels by 2,069 personnel. It noted that when the Council directed MINUSMA to support efforts to stabilise central Mali as the mission's "second strategic priority" in

2019, it did so without increasing the troop ceiling. Council members, however, were not prepared to support the idea absent a formal proposal from the Secretary-General, and therefore the Council requested the Secretary-General's report on the mission's force level. Some members also seemed concerned that France's proposal came just as it announced that it would drawdown Operation Barkhane, its regional counter-terrorism force in the Sahel. China expressed the greatest reluctance, using its explanation of vote at resolution 2584's adoption to highlight that the most recent Secretary-General's report, dated 1 June, did not mention raising the troop ceiling, and, in their view, a new report on the issue by mid-July was unwarranted.

On sanctions, the P3, among other Council members, have supported their use against those obstructing the peace agreement. Russia has been the most sceptical about sanctions, at times raising concerns about whether new designations may alienate spoilers, as opposed to the intended effect of changing their behaviour.

France is the penholder on Mali. Ambassador Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) chairs the 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee.

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