

December 2017 Monthly Forecast

 securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2017-12/syria_49.php

Posted 30 November 2017

Download Complete Forecast: [PDF](#)

MIDDLE EAST

Syria

Expected Council Action

In December, the Council expects to receive the monthly briefings on political and humanitarian developments in Syria and on chemical weapons.

Council members are expected to negotiate the renewal of the authorisation, most recently extended through [resolution 2332](#), for cross-border and cross-line humanitarian access, which expires on 10 January 2018.

Key Recent Developments

Council dynamics in November were marked by the failure to renew the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the UN before its expiration on 17 November. On 7 November, Edmond Mulet, head of the JIM's leadership panel, and Izumi Nakamitsu, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, briefed the Council. Mulet shared the conclusions of the JIM's final report, which attributed responsibility for the 15-16 September 2016 attack in Um Hawsh to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and for the 4 April attack in Khan Shaykhun to the Syrian government. Most Council members, including the P3, publicly supported the conclusions of the JIM's final report, but Russia and some others questioned its findings or highlighted areas where they felt the conclusions were not definitive. In a 31 October letter, Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia (Russia) raised questions about the JIM's investigations of incidents of alleged chemical use without on-site visits and criticised the non-observance of the chain of custody, the failure to use all available methods and methodologies of investigation, and the questionable credibility of the JIM's sources.

These differences were reflected in the US and Russian draft resolutions circulated on 2 November. The initial US draft characterised the information obtained by the JIM as constituting "sufficient, credible and reliable evidence to reach conclusions on those responsible for the use of chemical weapons"; the Russian text addressed its methodological concerns. While Russia did not ask for a discussion on its draft, there were several rounds of negotiations on the US draft. (Please refer to our 16 November [What's in Blue](#) story for a detailed account of the negotiation process.)

At a 16 November meeting, Russia called for a procedural vote on the sequence of voting on the two draft resolutions, which by then were already in blue. Russia's motion to have its draft voted on after the US draft did not pass since it only received the support of

China, Russia and Bolivia (seven Council members voted against and five abstained). Russia then withdrew its draft and vetoed the US draft (Bolivia also voted against; China and Egypt abstained). Following the defeat of the US draft, Bolivia re-tabled the Russian draft as its own and asked for a vote; it only received favourable votes from Russia, Bolivia, China and Kazakhstan (seven Council members voted against and four abstained), so it was not adopted.

After the meeting, Japan circulated a draft that would have extended the JIM's mandate for one month while requesting the UN Secretary-General to, in coordination with the OPCW, submit proposals to the Council for the structure and methodology of the JIM "reflecting views of Security Council members". Twelve members voted for the draft resolution, but Russia, which had already signaled that it did not support this draft in a meeting in consultations on 17 November, cast its 11th veto on Syria later that day (Bolivia also voted against, China abstained).

Although Council members met after the veto in an attempt to find a compromise before the expiration of the JIM's mandate by midnight, no further action was taken. In a last-ditch attempt to revive the JIM, Italy circulated a draft letter to the Secretary-General requesting that the organisational and administrative arrangements pertaining to the JIM be maintained until 31 December pending a final decision on the renewal of its mandate. Sweden and Uruguay also circulated a draft to extend the JIM's mandate for a year, aiming to reach a compromise among the competing perspectives in the Council. Russia opposed both initiatives.

On the political track, briefing the Council on 26 October, Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura called upon those with influence on the government to press it to negotiate substantive issues in the upcoming round of the intra-Syrian talks scheduled for 28 November in Geneva. In consultations that day, several Council members reacted to Russia's announcement that it intended to hold a general people's congress of Syrians at the Hmeimim military airbase. They stressed that any initiative must be consistent with the framework of UN-facilitated talks in Geneva. Nebenzia reassured Council members that this was the case, but in subsequent meetings several Council members have further questioned Russia's intentions in convening this meeting, which is now expected to be held in early December in Sochi, Russia. Several Syrian opposition groups met in Riyadh on 22 November in a conference aimed at developing common negotiating positions and forming a single delegation.

November has seen a resurgence of government attacks in Eastern Ghouta, one of the de-escalation areas. On 10 November, Jan Egeland, a senior humanitarian advisor to de Mistura, warned that civilians besieged in Eastern Ghouta face "complete catastrophe" because of continuing attacks, the need for medical evacuations, and the lack of humanitarian access.

In anticipation of the Council's consideration of the re-authorisation of cross-border and cross-line humanitarian access, OCHA has repeatedly stressed the vital role that authorisation plays in the delivery of aid. Regular programming is only able to reach territories held by the Syrian government, and cross-line operations remain limited as a

result of the removal of items, bureaucratic impediments imposed by the government and insecurity that hinders access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas. OCHA states that the establishment of de-escalation areas has not improved access. However, through cross-border deliveries from Turkey and Jordan, which only require notifying the Syrian government in advance of each shipment, the UN and its partners have delivered health assistance sufficient for nearly 15 million treatments and, in the last two years, nearly one million people have received food assistance monthly. The 26 October report of the Secretary-General stressed the importance of preserving all possible means of humanitarian access.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 27 October statement, High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein called the situation of at least 350,000 besieged civilians in Eastern Ghouta “an outrage”, saying “the deliberate starvation of civilians as a method of warfare constitutes a clear violation of international humanitarian law and may amount to a crime against humanity and/or a war crime”. The statement also called on all those with involvement or influence in the conflict to facilitate the access of humanitarian aid. In a 10 November joint statement, the Special Rapporteur on the right to health, Dainius Pūras, and the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Hilal Elver, called on the Syrian government to allow food and medical supplies to reach civilians trapped in Eastern Ghouta.

Key Issues and Options

More than six and a half years since the start of the war, P5 divisions have limited the options at the disposal of Council members. However, the recent failure to renew the JIM's mandate and anticipated divergences over the re-authorisation for cross-border and cross-line operations may signal a trend toward even deeper polarisation and limitations on the rare initiatives that have been able to elicit the unanimous support of the Council.

In light of recent events in the Council and other initiatives that aim at discussing political matters (such as the congress in Sochi or the Astana process), some Council members may want to reaffirm the agenda for the Geneva process established in [resolution 2254](#) and the centrality of the UN role in facilitating intra-Syrian talks. Council members could ask the sponsors of these initiatives to brief them on their plans and the mechanisms in place to ensure coherence with UN efforts sanctioned by the Council.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council divisions have been made apparent once again by two Russian vetoes on Syria within 24 hours. China decided to abstain on both votes. It has done so five times on a Syria resolution vetoed by Russia, while it has vetoed six other drafts jointly with Russia.

Regarding the JIM, Council dynamics in the negotiation process were dominated by the two original penholders who created it in 2015: the US and Russia. Even though elected members met regularly on this issue for weeks, divergent views among them prevented them from forming a unified front. While some felt that the E10 were well positioned to break the impasse, others thought that tabling a third draft would undermine the then-ongoing negotiations on the US draft.

In the past few months, Russia has expressed its preference for rolling back the authorisation for UN cross-border delivery of humanitarian aid, highlighting the establishment of de-escalation areas and the need to work with the Syrian government. However, OCHA and most Council members have underlined the vital role that the cross-border authorisation has played in the delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria.

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA

Security Council Resolutions

31 December 2016 <u>S/RES/2336</u>	Welcomed efforts by Russia and Turkey to end violence in Syria and jumpstart a political process.
21 December 2016 <u>S/RES/2332</u>	This resolution renewed the authorisation for cross-border aid delivery until 10 January 2018.
18 December 2015 <u>S/RES/2254</u>	This was the first resolution focused exclusively on a political solution to the Syrian crisis. It was adopted unanimously.
27 September 2013 <u>S/RES/2118</u>	This resolution was adopted unanimously by the Council and required the verification and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles, called for the convening of the Geneva II peace talks and endorsed the establishment of a transitional governing body in Syria with full executive powers.

Security Council Letters

3 November 2017 <u>S/2017/931</u>	This was a letter forwarding the OPCW's Fact-Finding Mission report concluding that sarin "was more than likely used as a chemical weapon" on 30 March in Lataminah.
30 October 2017 <u>S/2017/916</u>	This was a letter transmitting the OPCW report on progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme.
26 October 2017 <u>S/2017/904</u>	This was a letter from the Leadership Panel of the OPCW submitting the seventh report of the Joint Investigative Mechanism.
25 October 2017 <u>S/2017/905</u>	This was a letter that included clarifications from the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission explaining why it did not deploy to Khan Shaykhun.

Security Council Meeting Records

17 November 2017 <u>S/PV.8107</u>	This was the meeting at which Russia vetoed a Japanese draft to renew the JIM.
--	--

16 November 2017 <u>S/PV.8105</u>	This was the meeting at which Russia cast a veto on a US draft renewing the JIM and a Russian draft failed to secure nine votes.
--	--

7 November 2017 <u>S/PV.8090</u>	This was a briefing by Mulet and Nakamitsu.
--	---

Other

17 November 2017 <u>S/2017/970</u>	This was a Japanese draft extending the JIM that was vetoed by Russia.
---	--

16 November 2017 <u>S/2017/968</u>	This was a Russian draft extending the JIM that was put to a vote by Bolivia but did not secure nine votes.
---	---

16 November 2017 <u>S/2017/962</u>	This was the US draft to extend the JIM, which was vetoed by Russia.
---	--
