

January 2016 Monthly Forecast

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MIDDLE EAST

Syria

Expected Council Action

Council members will receive their regular monthly briefings on the chemical weapons and humanitarian tracks in Syria. Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura is also expected to brief on the political track in January.

It is possible that there may be action in the Council towards authorising a ceasefire plan for Syria if one is agreed. [Resolution 2254](#) requested the Secretary-General to provide options for ceasefire monitoring by mid-January 2016. How quickly such an authorisation will proceed in the Council is highly dependent on whether political talks begin in January.

Key Recent Developments

On 18 December 2015, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted [resolution 2254](#) at a ministerial-level meeting and enshrined the sequence of events that the international community deems necessary to end the Syrian crisis: UN-mediated political talks to begin in January 2016, a national ceasefire and a 2-year timeline to achieve a Syrian political transition. The text, agreed by the P5 only hours before the adoption, did not address the role of President Bashar al-Assad in any political transition.

The Council's 18 December meeting had been anticipated since the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) met on [14 November in Vienna](#). At the November meeting, the ISSG set an ambitious timeframe to prepare for a parallel ceasefire and political process by January 2016 that would lead to credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance within six months. This would be followed by the drafting of a constitution and elections within 18 months.

Between the November and December ISSG meetings, preparatory work to forge a unified opposition as well as to identify which among the armed groups should be identified as terrorists was facilitated by Saudi Arabia and Jordan respectively. Russia's public comments about its dissatisfaction with both of these preparatory processes cast doubt on whether the ISSG, let alone the Council, would be in a position to convene in December. The events of 18 December were finally agreed after US Secretary of State John Kerry's visit to Moscow on 15 December to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

On the morning of 18 December, the ISSG met in New York to discuss the UN's provisional arrangements to facilitate talks between government and opposition delegations in early 2016. It seems likely that the first round will be proximity talks that may initially avoid the harder political issues and focus solely on negotiating a ceasefire.

At the ISSG meeting, Saudi Arabia presented the final communiqué of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces that was agreed at a meeting held in Riyadh on 9 and 10 December 2015. Jordan updated on the ongoing work in Amman to determine which actors in Syria should be identified as terrorist groups in addition to those already designated by the Security Council, such as Al-Qaida, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), and Al-Nusra Front. Such groups would be barred from participation in political talks and could be targeted by counter-terrorism operations.

One of the most powerful armed Islamist opposition groups inside Syria, Ahrar al-Sham, was pivotal in both the Amman and Riyadh processes. On the counter-terrorism track in Amman, there has been no agreement reached yet on which armed groups should also be identified as terrorists, but it seems that Russia is insisting that Ahrar al-Sham be included on that list. Meanwhile, on the opposition track in Riyadh, the opportunity for opposition groups to form a unified bloc was nearly lost when Ahrar al-Sham almost abandoned the conference. It seems that Ahrar al-Sham's commitment to the larger political process with the Syrian regime remains uncertain and their signature of the communiqué in Riyadh may be resisted by some of their commanders on the ground—especially in the absence of a firm timetable for Assad's departure.

On 21 December 2015, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Kyung-Wha Kang and High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres briefed the Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria. Guterres said the fact that nearly half of the 1 million people who arrived by boat in Europe this year are Syrians shows how unbearable things have become in the region. Kang expressed concern about the almost daily strikes carried out by the government and its allies (a thinly veiled reference to Russia's airstrikes) that have caused scores of civilian deaths. Media reports indicate Russian airstrikes against rebel-held Idlib on 21 December targeted marketplaces, residential areas and official buildings, causing 43 deaths. Russia has not confirmed whether it carried out the strikes.

Kang reported that cross-border operations authorised by the Council have had a significant effect on improving humanitarian access. Throughout December, the humanitarian pen-holders—Jordan, New Zealand and Spain—led negotiations on a draft resolution to renew the authorisation in resolution 2191 for cross-border and cross-line humanitarian access in Syria. They began negotiations early with a view to adopt before Jordan's term on the Council ended on 31 December. However, negotiations were difficult due to Russia's insistence on including language on terrorism and suggesting that cross-border aid has been used to assist ISIS. The resolution was finally adopted on 22 December. It renewed the 2191 authorisations until January 2017 and included language calling on member states to prevent and suppress the flow of foreign terrorist fighters in and out of Syria.

In other developments, on 2 December 2015, Acting UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Kim Won-soo briefed Council members on the regular chemical weapons track. The report he presented to Council members included the results of the OPCW fact-finding mission that investigated three incidents of alleged chemical weapons use. Two were in rebel-held areas and the third was in a government-held area. The report concluded that in the two instances of chemical weapons attacks against rebel-held areas, toxic chemicals including chlorine and mustard gas had been used, though the mission's mandate did not allow it to attribute responsibility for the attacks. It did not reach a similar conclusion in relation to the government's claim. Separately, the three-member leadership panel of the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism—or JIM, the mechanism with the mandate to attribute responsibility for chemical weapons attacks—visited Damascus on 17 December. The JIM is expected to submit the first report of its activities to the Council by mid-February 2016. However, the JIM is not required to have reached any conclusions by that date.

On 8 December 2015, Russia requested a briefing under “any other business” in consultations on the Turkish deployment of an armoured battalion in northern Iraq. It seems that during consultations, Russia raised Turkey's downing of a Russian jet near the Syrian border in late November, and suggested that Turkey was a reckless partner in the anti-ISIS fight.

On 16 December 2015, the Council held a briefing and adopted a presidential statement on trafficking in persons in situations of conflict. The meeting and presidential statement focused on human trafficking by terrorists, with an overwhelming focus on how ISIS generates revenue through trafficking and the slave trade, with a particular impact on women and children.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 17 December 2015, the Council adopted resolution 2253 on the 1267/1989 Al-Qaida sanctions regime which added ISIS, also referred to as ISIL, to the sanctions list, making it the “ISIL and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee”. While ISIS has been on the sanctions list since 30 May 2013 under “Al-Qaida in Iraq”, the renaming of the sanctions committee to include a reference to ISIS signals the Council's focus on addressing the threat to international peace and security from this group.

Key Issues

The essential issue for the Council—in the fifth year of a war that has exacted a death toll of 250,000, injured one million and displaced half of the Syrian population, including nearly 4.4 million refugees—is to build on the momentum of resolution 2254, and exert effective leadership in supporting a cessation of violence and efforts to implement a political solution.

Options

The ISSG and resolution 2254 have identified roles for the Security Council in the event that anticipated political talks in January produce concrete results towards a national ceasefire. How such a ceasefire would be monitored will likely require more consideration

by the Council after receiving options from the Secretary-General. The only specification in the [14 November ISSG statement](#) was that such a mission would operate in areas where monitors would not come under threat of terrorist attacks. The UN is planning “light touch” options based out of Damascus—proxies calling in violations that could be investigated by a small group of UN officials.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Many Council members view the adoption of resolution 2254 as a significant achievement, as it was the first time the Security Council adopted a resolution focused exclusively on a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

Several Council members believe that the confluence of the Russian military involvement in Syria, the surge of Syrians seeking refuge in Europe, and the expanding reach of ISIS (whether real or perceived) has tipped the P5 closer to consensus on a political solution for Syria. The contours of that solution were partially indicated by resolution 2254. However, the answer to the fundamental question that has divided the P5 since the beginning of the Syrian conflict has remained intentionally ambiguous—the role of Assad in any political transition.

It is not clear whether the shift in position by the P3 and some regional states—that Assad’s exit from power does not have to be immediate—will be sufficient for Russia and Iran to modify their positions, which continue to exhibit a preference for a power-sharing arrangement (rather than a transitional government), sequencing such power-sharing only within the context of a united effort against terrorism, and elections that do not exclude Assad.

France is the penholder on Syria overall. Jordan, New Zealand and Spain lead on humanitarian issues. In practice, however, most texts are agreed between Russia and the US prior to seeking agreement by the broader Council.

Egypt will replace Jordan in the Arab seat on the Council as of 1 January 2016. Some Council members are interested to see how Egypt’s greater hostility to Islamist opposition groups will impact Council dynamics on the Syrian political track.

UN Documents

Security Council Resolutions

18 December 2015 S/RES/2254	This was the first resolution focused exclusively on a political solution to the Syrian crisis. It was adopted unanimously.
20 November 2015 S/RES/2249	Called for member states to take all necessary measures on the territory under the control of ISIS to prevent terrorist acts committed by ISIS and other Al-Qaida affiliates.
7 August 2015 S/RES/2235	This was a resolution that requested the UN Secretary-General and OPCW Director-General to recommend the establishment and operation of a UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism to determine responsibility for the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

6 March 2015 <u>S/RES/2209</u>	This resolution condemned the use of toxic chemicals such as chlorine, without attributing blame; stressed that those responsible should be held accountable; recalled resolution 2118; and supported the 4 February 2015 decision of the OPCW.
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.
22 December 2015 <u>S/RES/2258</u>	Renewed authorisation for cross-border humanitarian access until January 2017.
17 December 2014 <u>S/RES/2191</u>	Renewed authorisation for cross-border humanitarian access until 10 January 2016.
14 July 2014 <u>S/RES/2165</u>	This resolution authorised cross-border and cross-line access for the UN and its partners to deliver humanitarian aid in Syria without state consent and established a monitoring mechanism for 180 days.
22 February 2014 <u>S/RES/2139</u>	This resolution demanded that all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, allow humanitarian access in Syria across conflict lines, in besieged areas and across borders and expressed the intent to take further steps in the case of non-compliance.

Security Council Presidential Statements

16 December 2015 <u>S/PRST/2015/25</u>	This was a presidential statement on trafficking in persons in situations of conflict, with a particular focus on ISIS and the impact on women and children.
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Security Council Meeting Records

21 December 2015 <u>S/PV.7592</u>	This was on the humanitarian situation with briefings by OCHA and High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres.
18 December 2015 <u>S/PV.7588</u>	This was the ministerial-level meeting when resolution 2254 on a political solution to the Syrian crisis was adopted.
16 December 2015 <u>S/PV.7585</u>	This was a briefing on the trafficking of persons in situations of conflict by Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson and Yury Fedotov, the Executive Director of the UN Office of Drugs and Crime.

Security Council Letters

10 December 2015 <u>S/2015/946</u>	Germany reported to the Security Council that it would take military action against ISIS in Syria, citing resolution 2249 and Article 51 of the UN Charter—the right of self-defense under Chapter VII.
3 December 2015 <u>S/2015/928</u>	The UK reported to the Security Council that it would take military action against ISIS in Syria, citing resolution 2249 and Article 51 of the UN Charter—the right of self-defense under Chapter VII.

Secretary-General's Reports

11 December 2015 <u>S/2015/962</u>	This was the Secretary-General's report on the humanitarian situation.
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24 November 2015 <u>S/2015/908</u>	This was the 26th OPCW report on chemical weapons that included the results of the OPCW fact-finding mission's investigation into three allegations of chemical weapons use.
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