

July 2018 Monthly Forecast

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MIDDLE EAST

Syria

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

Military logic continues to drive developments in Syria. The government has consolidated its territory and has continued to target areas that were supposed to be part of the de-escalation zones established by the Astana process. Aerial bombardments in Idlib by the government and its allies, as well as military operations in the country's southwest, have the potential for further escalation given the strategic importance of these areas near Syria's borders for external actors.

Despite limited traction, Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura has been exploring options for a re-launch of the UN-facilitated political process. He has focused particularly on facilitating the establishment of a constitutional committee, which was the main outcome of a January conference hosted in Sochi by Russia, along with Iran and Turkey. It was agreed at the meeting that the UN would help in forming a constitutional committee, including defining its mandate, terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure, and selection criteria for its composition. Although the Syrian government had repeatedly questioned the committee's legitimacy, de Mistura announced at a press conference on 14 June that Syria had provided a list of 50 candidates to be members of the committee. He told reporters that opposition groups are working on providing their list as well. He also emphasised the importance of including civil society and the aspiration of having women make up 30 percent of the committee. On 18-19 June, de Mistura convened a meeting in Geneva with senior officials from Iran, Russia and Turkey to discuss the formation of the constitutional committee. On 25 June, he held a similar meeting with senior members of the so-called Small Group (France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the UK and the US).

The humanitarian situation in Syria remains critical. The lack of safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access has been an ongoing factor in the conflict. By imposing bureaucratic hurdles and removing crucial items from the convoys that are allowed to proceed, the government has been able to limit humanitarian access. On 29 May, Mark Lowcock, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, [briefed](#) the Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria. He described how, after taking control of Eastern Ghouta and Yarmouk, the government had continued to prevent access by UN humanitarian actors, which is required in order for needs to be assessed and assistance

and protection scaled up. In his 20 June monthly report on the humanitarian situation, the Secretary-General reiterated that UN humanitarian agencies continue to be denied access to these formerly besieged areas, which are now considered hard-to-reach locations.

Council members received a 19 June Secretary-General's report containing a review of the UN's humanitarian cross-border operations. The report, which had been requested by Russia in the negotiations of resolution 2393 in December 2017, explains the processes in place to ensure accountable, effective and transparent cross-border operations, based on assessments of needs and with prior notification to the Syrian government. Three key areas covered in the report are the technical functioning of the operations; the impact of the operations on people in need in the country; and the accountability mechanisms for projects that are managed remotely. The review also emphasises that there are 2.67 million people in need in areas accessed solely through cross-border operations and that these deliveries remain critical. Council members considered the review in a meeting on 27 June.

On 13 June, the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) concluded that sarin was very likely used as a chemical weapon in the south of Lataminah on 24 March 2017. The FFM also concluded that chlorine was very likely used as a chemical weapon at the Lataminah Hospital and the surrounding area the next day. So far, similar conclusions have been reached about attacks with chemical weapons on 20 March 2017 also in Lataminah and on 4 February 2018 in the rebel-held Al Talil neighbourhood of Saraqib. Efforts persist to bring about an attribution mechanism for chemical weapons attacks to ensure accountability. A conference of state parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention held on 26-27 June mandated the OPCW to help identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Ahead of the meeting, Russia had asked for meetings under "any other business" after consultations on 11 and 14 June to express its concerns about the prospect of such a tasking of OPCW by the conference of state parties.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 20 June, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria published a report on the siege of Eastern Ghouta, which it characterised as marked by war crimes and crimes against humanity. During its 38th session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) held an interactive dialogue on the report on 26 June. The HRC also considered the summary report on the high-level panel discussion on violations of the human rights of children in Syria that took place during its 37th session ([A/HRC/38/29](#)). At press time, the HRC was expected to adopt a resolution at the end of the session on the human rights situation in Syria.

Key Issues and Options

The current level of P5 divisions raises the question of whether the Council will be able to work constructively on Syria in the foreseeable future. If the paralysis continues, those with even a limited capacity to act—whether elected members, the Secretary-General, or key members of the General Assembly—may seek to take the initiative. The Secretary-General could provide options for the Council to consider, or he could directly mobilise

the mechanism for the investigation of alleged use of chemical and biological weapons which was developed in the 1980s and was activated previously in the Syrian context in March 2013. Given the lack of unanimity among permanent members and the Council's failure to exercise its primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security, members of the General Assembly could consider tabling a "Uniting for Peace" resolution.

While divided on Syria for more than seven years, the Council has been able to unite around some aspects of the conflict during some of that time, such as setting the agenda for a political process, investigating the use and providing for the destruction of chemical weapons, and authorising cross-border deliveries. As the political climate deteriorated, the mandate of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism was discontinued in late 2017 and there is a risk of further undermining of Council decisions. Council members could hold informal, unscripted and forward-looking discussions at the ambassadorial level to seek ways to increase pressure on the parties to the conflict and strive for a compromise that is both realistic and acceptable to all.

Since it was established in August 2011, the HRC's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria has briefed Council members in an Arria-formula meeting seven times. Council members could hold a meeting to be briefed on the Commission's most recent report, on the siege of Eastern Ghouta, which could also be transmitted to the Council as an official document. The last Arria-formula meeting with the Commission took place on 21 April 2017.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council dynamics on Syria continue to be characterised by increased polarisation on the three files through which the conflict is discussed: political, humanitarian and chemical weapons. In May, P5 members started meeting regularly on Syria at the ambassadorial level, but it seems that these discussions have now subsided.

In December 2017, the adoption of resolution 2393, drafted by Egypt, Japan and Sweden, renewed for a year the authorisation for cross-border and cross-line humanitarian access to Syria. It was adopted with the abstentions of Bolivia, China and Russia. In explaining their vote, China and Russia highlighted the importance of working through the government and eventually rolling back a provision that had been devised originally as a temporary measure. It is unclear whether their concerns are addressed by the recent review of the UN's humanitarian cross-border operations, which describes the procedures in place for these operations to be accountable, effective and transparent.

Kuwait and Sweden are the penholders on humanitarian issues in Syria.

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA

Security Council Resolutions

24 February 2018 <u>S/RES/2401</u>	This was a resolution, adopted unanimously, demanding a cessation of hostilities in Syria.
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19 December 2017 <u>S/RES/2393</u>	This resolution renewed the authorisation for cross-border and cross-line aid delivery.
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.

Secretary-General's Reports

20 June 2018 <u>S/2018/619</u>	This was the Secretary-General's monthly report on the humanitarian situation in Syria.
19 June 2018 <u>S/2018/617</u>	This was the Secretary-General's latest report on the cross-border delivery of humanitarian aid to Syria.

Security Council Letters

19 June 2018 <u>S/2018/620</u>	This was a letter containing a report of the Fact-Finding Mission of the OPCW determining that sarin was very likely used as a chemical weapon in the south of Lataminah on 24 March 2017, and that chlorine was very likely used as a chemical weapon at the Lataminah Hospital and the surrounding area the next day.
1 June 2018 <u>S/2018/523</u>	This was an OPCW report on progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme.

Security Council Meeting Record

29 May 2018 <u>S/PV.8269</u>	This was a briefing by Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock.
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