

August 2012 Monthly Forecast

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MIDDLE EAST

UNSMIS (Syria)

Expected Council Action

The mandate of the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) ends on 19 August. The Council will hold two rounds of consultations on UNSMIS in August which will likely focus on the Secretary-General's assessment of the security situation in Syria and recommendations for the mission's future. (Resolution 2059 renewed UNSMIS for a final period of 30 days and requested reporting within 15 days.)

It seems likely that peacekeeping head Hervé Ladsous—who visited Syria in late July to assess the situation—will brief the Council in early August. It was unclear at press time if UN-Arab League Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan would also brief and whether the UNSMIS mandate would be renewed for a further period.

Key Recent Developments

The overall level of violence in Syria has continued to escalate, with the government increasing its military operations in population centres and armed opposition groups intensifying attacks against government forces and installations, particularly in Damascus and Aleppo. On 14 July the ICRC determined that the fighting in Syria met its threshold for an internal armed conflict, i.e. civil war. The UN estimates 10,000 killed since the crisis began in March 2011, while other monitoring groups report figures as high as 17,000.

On 11 July, Council members were briefed by Annan on his mediation efforts, including his 9 July meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Annan said neither the government nor the opposition had embraced his six-point plan and asked Council members to endorse the Action Group communiqué of 30 June and insist on consequences for Syria's non-compliance with Council decisions. (The communiqué called for all parties to recommit to the six-point plan and mapped out steps for a Syrian-led political process.)

After Annan's briefing, the UK circulated a draft resolution co-sponsored by France, Germany, Portugal and the US that, under Chapter VII, endorsed the communiqué, renewed UNSMIS for 45 days and threatened sanctions if the Syrian government did not cease the use of heavy weapons and withdraw from population centres within ten days. Russia had also circulated a draft resolution endorsing the communiqué, renewing UNSMIS for three months but making no reference to any consequence for non-

compliance. There were numerous rounds of negotiations regarding the UNSMIS renewal up to the vote on 19 July, when the UK draft resolution was vetoed by Russia and China with Pakistan and South Africa abstaining. (Russia did not call for a vote on its draft.)

On 20 July the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2059, which renewed the UNSMIS mandate for a final period of 30 days and took into consideration the Secretary-General's recommendations to reconfigure the mission in light of the deteriorating security situation in Syria. The resolution also conditioned any further renewal of UNSMIS on the cessation of the use of heavy weapons by the government and a reduction in violence by all sides. (On 25 July, Ladsous announced the drawdown of half of the 300 authorised military observers. On 24 July, Lt. Gen. Babacar Gaye of Senegal took over as acting head of UNSMIS after Maj. Gen. Robert Mood of Norway ended his tour on 20 July.)

There were three particularly significant developments during the Council's negotiations on the UNSMIS renewal:

On Thursday, 12 July, there were reports of an escalation of violence in Tremseh near Hama, resulting in significant casualties. On Friday, Annan said that the Syrian government violated its commitments under resolutions 2042 and 2043 and once again urged consequences for non-compliance. Over that weekend, UNSMIS visited Tremseh and confirmed that the attack involved the use of artillery, mortars and small arms. It also said that specific groups and houses, mainly of army defectors and activists, appear to have been targeted. The government denied the use of heavy weapons.

On 13 July, media reports indicated that US officials were concerned about Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons. On 22 July, the US said it would "hold accountable" any Syrian official involved in the use of such weapons. On 23 July, Israeli officials reported that Syrian stockpiles were being moved as a precaution to avoid chemical weapons falling into rebel hands. The same day the Syrian foreign ministry said chemical weapons would be used only in the event of an external attack on the country. On 24 July, Russia said Syria should strictly adhere to the international ban on the use of chemical weapons.

On 18 July a targeted bombing in Damascus killed four senior security officials of the Syrian government, including the defence and interior ministers as well as Assad's brother-in-law. On 24 July, Assad reshuffled his top security posts.

Media reports indicate continuing defections from the Syrian military, bringing the number of generals who have fled to Turkey to approximately 27 as well as an undisclosed number of regular soldiers. In addition, a Syrian parliamentarian and Syria's ambassadors in Cyprus, Iraq and the United Arab Emirates defected.

The defection by Brig. Gen. Manaf Tlass on 6 July has been perceived as significant since he is considered a former member of Assad's inner circle. Tlass made his first public statement on 24 July, when he said it was "the duty of Syrians to unite, to build a free,

democratic Syria.” (Some analysts note that Tlass has been flagged for a leadership role in any post-Assad transition.)

The Arab League hosted a Syrian opposition conference with some 250 participants in Cairo on 2 July, during which general agreement was reached on support for the Free Syrian Army and the exclusion of Assad from any transition process. However, there was no agreement on forming a body to represent a unified opposition. There continue to be rifts over views on the credibility of internal versus external opposition groups, military intervention and Islamic political parties. The Arab League ministerial committee on Syria (chaired by Qatar and including Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Sudan) met in Doha on 22 July, calling on Assad to “renounce power” for “a safe exit.” The statement also called on the Free Syrian Army rebels and the opposition to form a transitional government. On 24 July, Arab League Secretary-General Nabil el-Araby said the emphasis must be on a peaceful transfer of power in Syria. Syria rejected the demand for Assad to renounce power.

The conclusions from the 6 July Friends of Syria meeting in Paris—which involved 107 states, but not China or Russia—also emphasised that Assad must relinquish power.

Human Rights-Related Developments

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay briefed Security Council members in consultations on Syria on 2 July. Pillay reported deliberate targeting by the government of medical facilities and use of some of those facilities as detention centres; the arbitrary arrest, detention and systematic torture of detainees by government authorities; and rape and sexual violence against men, women and children in detention or during house raids. (On 16 July, the acting Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict echoed such reports of sexual violence by government forces and their armed militias, or *Shabiha*, describing them as “alarming.”)

On 6 July the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution (A/HRC/RES/20/22) condemning the gross human rights violations and indiscriminate targeting of civilians in Syria by government authorities and the *Shabiha*. The resolution also expressed concern about the reports it received from its Commission of Inquiry about human rights violations by both government and opposition forces.

Key Issue

The key issue for the Council is that Syria is now in a state of civil war, and the conflict has become militarised to such a degree that it seems there is currently little political space remaining to negotiate a peaceful solution to the crisis. (On 19 July, Mood said that the escalation of violence had reached an unprecedented level.)

Underlying Problems

The military balance of power in Syria is not shifting away from the government despite the defections from the military and more organised armed rebel groups (which lack both central military and political strategic control) demonstrated by the regime’s ability to regain control relatively quickly of positions captured by the opposition.

It seems that while the Syrian government believes it can prevail in the conflict militarily there appears to be some acknowledgement that in any post-conflict situation the regime will be unable to govern Syria credibly.

It is unclear when and whether military or political considerations will finally tip the crisis towards its end game. Nevertheless, it seems both the government and armed opposition groups are fully intent on the military option. Meanwhile, the negative impact on regional security is manifesting itself with serious spillover effects, including pockets of violence in northern Lebanon; the military build-up by Turkey on the border, increasing tension with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and revived talk of "safe zones"; the late July spike in terrorist attacks in Iraq potentially linked to the Syrian crisis; the risk for insecurity on the border with the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights; and heightened international rhetoric about chemical weapons.

Options

Options for the Council include:

- maintaining the mission at its currently reduced level of 150 military observers and a civilian component;
- reducing the mission to a small political office with liaison tasks and limited verification and reporting capacity; or
- withdrawal or non-renewal of the mission.

It seems the most likely option—if both sides continue to pursue the military option—would be not to renew the UNSMIS mandate. It is also possible that the Secretary-General may make the operational decision to withdraw the mission prior to the mandate's expiry due to security considerations.

If UNSMIS is not renewed then the Secretary-General could maintain the "added value" of the reporting capacity under the UN Country Team.

A further option for the Council is to request a de-briefing from both Mood and Annan's former deputy Jean-Marie Guéhenno as "lessons learned" exercise.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members will continue to be unanimous in their concern about the devastating level of violence in Syria. Nevertheless, few believe the situation will improve in the coming weeks to sufficiently meet the conditions set out in resolution 2059 for a further renewal.

A significant majority of Council members seem to share the view of the P3 that there is no role for UNSMIS given the current situation in Syria. The mission was to support Annan's six-point plan and observe a reduction in violence, neither of which have occurred. On the other hand, a few members may agree with China and Russia, preferring to have the mandate renewed for a further period to allow more time for a political solution and to lend support to Annan's plan. (However, Council members are mindful

that Annan has not made any public statements following the 19 July veto. It is unclear what, if any, outcome there might be vis-à-vis Annan's mediation efforts following his 27 July meeting with the Secretary-General in London.)

Given the current deadlock in the Council it appears that active management of the Syrian crisis is poised to pass out of Council hands in the near term. After the veto, France, Germany, the UK and the US said they would continue to find ways to pressure the Syrian government outside of the Council. In addition, during the 25 July open debate on the Middle East, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, on behalf of the Arab Group, announced a forthcoming General Assembly draft resolution calling for political transition in Syria.

It seems the next juncture for active Council involvement will likely be an endorsement of any possible post-conflict assistance.

UN Documents

Security Council Resolution

20 JULY 2012
[S/RES/2059](#) Extended UNSMIS for a final period of 30 days.

Security Council Withdrawn and Vetoed Resolutions

19 JULY 2012
[S/2012/538](#) Was the UK draft UNSMIS resolution vetoed by China and Russia with abstentions by Pakistan and South Africa.

17 JULY 2012
[S/2012/547/Rev.2](#) Was the withdrawn Russian draft resolution renewing UNSMIS for three months.

Secretary-General's Report

6 JULY 2012
[S/2012/523](#) Included options for the UNSMIS renewal.

Security Council Letters

13 JULY 2012
[S/2012/542](#) Was from Special Envoy Kofi Annan regarding the Tremseh attacks.

5 JULY 2012
[S/2012/522](#) Was the final communiqué of the 30 June meeting of the Action Group for Syria in Geneva.