

Syria: Briefings on the Humanitarian and Political Tracks

 securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2014/10/syria-briefings-on-the-humanitarian-political-tracks.php

What's In Blue

Posted Wed 29 Oct 2014

Tomorrow morning (30 October), Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Kyung-wha Kang will brief the Security Council on humanitarian access in Syria pursuant to resolutions 2139 and 2165 and will present a report for the period 18 September to 17 October (S/2014/756). During consultations to be held following the briefing Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura will deliver his first briefing on the political track to Council members since taking up his post in September. While some members generally prefer keeping the Syrian humanitarian and political tracks separate, it appears that there was little disagreement over having a discussion with both Kang and de Mistura during the same consultations. It also seems that Argentina has circulated a draft press statement reacting to the deteriorating humanitarian situation and showing support for a political solution and de Mistura's efforts which may be discussed during the meeting.

Humanitarian Track Briefing

Kang is expected to provide an update on humanitarian aid deliveries. There have been 23 cross-border aid deliveries since resolution 2165 was adopted, however, while cross-line deliveries within Syria do occur, they remain inherently difficult due to the security situation and government procedures. The government continues to use administrative obstacles to slow aid while armed opposition groups and terrorist groups block access to each other's areas of control. Key elements of resolution 2139, such as observing medical neutrality and ceasing aerial bombardments, remain unimplemented.

Council members may also be interested in more information on the 28 October international conference in Berlin on Syrian refugees. Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey host the overwhelming majority of Syria's 3.2 million refugees and have begun to restrict the influx due to concerns about the destabilising impact on their own security and economic situations. Members may be interested in hearing Kang's thoughts on how such restrictions will impact those displaced by the conflict in the coming months and what can be done to address "host country fatigue".

While the public briefing is expected to stay firmly on the humanitarian track, it seems likely that during consultations some Council members may be interested in a broader discussion on how US-led strikes against the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) have impacted the wider humanitarian situation in Syria. The report notes that these air strikes have led to some civilian deaths and displacement and that since they began on 22 September the Syrian military has ramped up its own air campaign against rebel-held areas.

The significant increase of aerial bombardment and alleged use of chlorine bombs by the Syrian government are also likely to encourage several Council members to reiterate their view that the Assad regime remains responsible for the majority of violations in the conflict. These members are likely to also express concern that there has been no progress in implementing any of the other key demands of resolution 2139 regarding human rights and protection of civilians, such as observing medical neutrality, ceasing aerial bombardments and easing administrative hurdles. However, there is no appetite among Council members to push for follow-up measures against the Syrian regime, such as targeted sanctions.

Regarding the escalating militarisation of the conflict, Council members will also be interested in receiving information on the Kurdish town of Kobani where there has been a preponderance of coalition strikes in an attempt to break ISIS's siege. Visiting Turkey between 18 and 20 October, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos said the ISIS onslaught around Kobani had caused nearly 190,000 civilians to flee to Turkey in a matter of weeks. She also said that humanitarians can save lives but they cannot deliver safety and security and that a political solution in Syria was urgently needed. The Secretary-General's report for consideration tomorrow echoed that sentiment and said that a military campaign alone cannot resolve Syria's crisis or stem the spread of terrorism.

Political Track Briefing

With this in mind, Council members will be keen during the consultations following Kang's briefing to hear de Mistura's plans to revive the political process following his meetings with key players in Damascus, Amman, Ankara, Beirut, Cairo, Moscow, Riyadh and Tehran. Since he took up his post in September, he has been working around the "Assad knot" enshrined in the 30 June 2012 Geneva Communiqué—i.e. trying to find openings between Iran and Russia's support for the Assad regime and the position of the P3 and their Arab allies that Assad must go. It seems that in his discussions with key actors in the region, de Mistura has been exploring how Iran's four-point plan for Syria could gain traction as well as the more immediate impact of localised ceasefires in Syria as a way towards some stabilisation during the conflict.

Iran's four-point plan was first presented former Syria envoy Lakhdar Brahimi in March 2014. At that time, it reportedly prioritised fighting terrorism, endorsed elections, made room for a possible national unity government and foresaw some role for Assad. Given that in the interim this plan has been superseded by events on the ground—in particular the re-election of Assad to a further seven-year term—Council members will be interested to hear from de Mistura on whether the gaps between the Geneva Communiqué and Iran's plan regarding Assad's future can be bridged to find a way forward.

In the lead-up to Geneva II peace talks in May, Iran and Russia said they were not wedded to Assad, but have maintained that he should play some part in any transition. Meanwhile, the US maintains Assad has lost legitimacy and must go, but seems to have signaled some flexibility regarding the "how and when" of his departure. While Council

members are aware of these incremental shifts outside of Council proceedings, few believe it will be openly discussed tomorrow given that the basic positions in the Council on this issue remain entrenched.

Several Council members are expected to express serious concern over the issue of localised ceasefires, a matter that was contentious in the lead up to the adoption of resolution 2165 in July. Russia has consistently pointed to localised ceasefires as a way towards less violence and an eventual political settlement. Most other Council members believe that such ceasefires were only possible because of years of government bombardment and siege tactics to starve an area into submission and cannot be seen as a positive example of engagement between the government and opposition.

These members may point out that the report under consideration tomorrow highlights the ongoing negotiations for a ceasefire in Homs, Darraya and the Yarmouk camp, and that all have been subject to brutal tactics by the government. Council members may be interested to hear if de Mistura is aware of any localised ceasefires not achieved through siege and starvation tactics. These Council members will also likely stress that starvation of civilians as a method of combat is prohibited by international humanitarian law and that any agreed ceasefires need to be in line with humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law as per resolution 2165.

Several Council members think that the Council has ignored the political track for too long, and are keen to engage with the new Special Envoy. However, de Mistura will likely want to limit expectations of any bold plans in the near term. Few Council members expect that there will be an attempt at a third round of peace talks and instead presume his efforts will be focused on discreet shuttle diplomacy. De Mistura is expected to return to the region in early November and Council members may express an interest tomorrow in hearing from him on a regular basis.

Looking ahead, some Council members are starting to think about the next steps leading up to the expiry in January 2015 of the authorisation in resolution 2165 for cross-border and cross-line humanitarian access.

Tags: [Insights](#), [Insights on the Middle East](#), [Syria](#)