

September 2012 Monthly Forecast

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Posted 31 August 2012

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MIDDLE EAST

Syria

Expected Council Action

In the aftermath of the 19 August expiration of the mandate of the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS), at press time there was no Syria-related activity scheduled for the Security Council in September. However, it is highly probable that the Council will continue to follow the situation in Syria closely. There are several opportunities during the month for the Council to be apprised of the situation, including the regular Middle East briefing and consultations or the monthly “horizon scanning” briefing by the Department of Political Affairs. Although nothing had been announced, at press time it seemed possible that there might be a meeting of the core group of the “Friends of Syria” on the margins of the General Assembly in late September.

At press time the Council was expecting to have an interactive dialogue with Lakhdar Brahimi, the newly appointed UN-Arab League Joint Special Representative for Syria, and it is possible that it may request a more formal briefing on the Syrian situation from him in September.

Key Recent Developments

The overall level of violence in Syria has continued to escalate, with fighting in urban areas increasing, particularly in Aleppo. On 25 August, hundreds of civilians were massacred in Daraya. The Secretary-General has condemned the crime and called for an immediate investigation.

The UN estimates 17,000 people have been killed since the crisis began in March 2011, while other sources indicate figures as high as 23,000. Meanwhile, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees reports more than 200,000 registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Iraq. OCHA has reported that almost 2.5 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance.

Hervé Ladsous, the head of peacekeeping, briefed Council members in consultations on 2 August on the security situation in Syria and the implications for the future of UNSMIS. Also on 2 August, Kofi Annan, the joint UN-Arab League Special Envoy, resigned from his post.

On 3 August, the General Assembly adopted a resolution ([A/RES/66/253 B](#)) deploring the Security Council’s failure to act on Syria and calling for a political transition. The resolution was penned by the Arab Group, and 133 member states voted in favour, with 12 against and 31 abstentions.

Council members were briefed in consultations on 16 August by Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Edmond Mulet, who confirmed that the two conditions in resolution 2059 for a further renewal of UNSMIS—cessation of the use of heavy weapons and a reduction in violence by all sides—had not been achieved. (UNSMIS had been unable to exercise its key monitoring functions since 15 June.) These consultations took place against the backdrop of an increasing deterioration in the security situation in Syria. That same morning, Russia had circulated a draft press statement responding to a 15 August bombing in Damascus near a hotel housing UNSMIS personnel and several military buildings. (Council members could not agree on the statement, and it was never issued.)

In remarks to the press following Mulet's briefing, Ambassador Gérard Araud (France), as the President of the Council in August, expressed the Council's agreement with the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a political liaison office in Damascus. The Secretary-General had highlighted in a 10 August letter ([S/2012/618](#)) that such a flexible presence in Syria would allow the UN to continue to play a reporting role, facilitate the political track between stakeholders and provide support to mediation efforts. It seems the office will have approximately 20 to 30 staff with expertise in human rights and political and civil affairs and will include a small number of military advisers.

On 17 August, the Secretaries-General of the UN and the Arab League announced the appointment of Lakhdar Brahimi (Algeria) as the Joint Special Representative for Syria. The same day the Security Council sent a letter ([S/2012/654](#)) to the Secretary-General reiterating support for his good offices and for the Joint Special Representative. On 21 August the Secretaries-General of the UN and the Arab Leagues announced the appointment of Nasser Al-Kidwa as the Deputy Joint Special Representative for Syria.

On 29 August, Council members had an informal meeting with Brahimi which allowed for an exchange of ideas on his role as Special Representative. (Brahimi's first official statement as Special Representative is likely to be during the General Assembly meeting on Syria on 4 September.)

On 30 August, France organised a high-level meeting on the humanitarian situation in Syria. The meeting was chaired by French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius. Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson briefed the Council together with the High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres. Foreign Ministers from Jordan and Turkey as well as ministers from Iraq and Lebanon also participated.

In other developments, Syrian Prime Minister Riyad Hajib defected on 6 August after only two months in office. From Jordan, Hijab claimed the regime of President Bashar al-Assad was collapsing and was in control of only 30 percent of Syrian territory.

On 9 August, an international meeting on Syria was held in Tehran with lower-level participants from nearly 30 countries, at which Iran proposed a Syrian national dialogue. There was no outcome from the meeting. In a statement delivered on his behalf, the Secretary-General said Syria faces the grim possibility of long civil war with tragic implications for its people and regional stability.

Turkey and the US agreed on 11 August to set up a working group to plan a joint response to the crisis—in particular regarding support to Syrian opposition groups and contingency planning concerning any potential misuse of the stockpile of chemical weapons in Syria.

At an emergency meeting on 15 August, held in Mecca, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) suspended Syria. The Secretary-General of the OIC, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, said the decision sent a strong message from the Muslim world to the Syrian regime.

Human Rights-Related Developments

The 15 August Commission of Inquiry report on Syria will be considered on 17 September during the next session of the Human Rights Council. The Commission reports that the Syrian government has perpetrated war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, extrajudicial killings and torture, gross violations of human rights and sexual violence. The report also notes that more brutal tactics and new military capabilities have been employed in recent months by both government forces and armed opposition groups. While opposition forces have committed war crimes, including murder and torture, the report finds that these violations are not of the same gravity, frequency and scale as those committed by government forces and its militia, the *Shabiha*. Regarding the 25 May el-Houleh attacks, the Commission's report concluded that government forces and *Shabiha* militia were responsible.

Key Issue

The key issue for the Council remains that Syria is in a state of civil war and has become militarised to such a degree that it seems there is little or no political space remaining to negotiate a peaceful solution to the crisis. Meanwhile, Council members, in particular the P5, have been unable to agree on an effective approach, leaving the Security Council in the position of watching the situation—which is a clear threat to international peace and security—unfold from the side-lines.

Options

Aside from following the Syrian situation through briefings, including possibly by Brahimi, Council options for September seem limited.

However, if Brahimi were to specifically request the Council to endorse a fresh approach to mediating the crisis in Syria, an option for the Council would be to issue a statement of support. (It seems his acceptance of the mediating role after Annan's resignation was conditioned on having unified support from the Security Council.)

An additional option for the Council is to request a de-briefing from Annan and Gen. Robert Mood, the former head of UNSMIS, in order to allow for a better understanding of the challenges that had been faced in carrying out their respective mediation and observation tasks, as well as identifying possible "lessons learned" for future UN missions.

As the refugee situation continues to grow, the possibility of neighbouring countries closing their borders may mean that the Council may have to consider options to ensure the safety of the civilian population trapped within Syria.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members remain deadlocked on an approach to the Syrian situation and, for the time being, any active management of the conflict has effectively passed from Council hands.

However, Council members continue to be unanimous in their concern about the devastating level of violence in Syria, and there is strong consensus regarding the importance of maintaining a UN presence in Damascus and similarly strong support for the Secretary-General's efforts in that regard.

It is as yet unclear how Council members might respond to Brahimi's apparent reluctance to be bound by initiatives not of his own making, in particular the six-point plan, which the Council endorsed both in resolution 2043 and in a 21 March presidential statement ([S/PRST/2012/6](#)). In addition, it seems Brahimi is concerned about the stalemate in the Council over President al-Assad's fate in any political transition and how this will affect mediation efforts on his part. It is possible that Brahimi may want a clear mandate from the Council to approach the issue of political transition without any preconditions. However, the P3 are keen to have this issue dealt with outside the Council, while Russia and China may be supportive of such an approach. Most Council members are of the view that the fundamental dynamics around the issue of regime change are unlikely to shift.

UN Documents

Security
Council
Resolutions

20 July 2012 This resolution extended UNSMIS for a final period of 30 days.
[S/RES/2059](#)

21 April 2012 This resolution established UNSMIS.
[S/RES/2043](#)

Security
Council
Presidential
Statement

21 March 2012 This presidential statement supported the Joint Special Envoy's six-point plan for mediation of the Syrian crisis.
[S/PRST/2012/6](#)

Security
Council Letters

17 August
2012 This letter from the Security Council reiterated support for the Secretary-General's good offices and for the Joint Special Representative for Syria.
[S/2012/654](#)

10 August
2012 This letter from the Secretary-General was on the implementation of resolution 2059 and confirmed the conditions for a further renewal of UNSMIS had not been achieved.
[S/2012/618](#)

5 July 2012
S/2012/522

This was the final communiqué of the 30 June meeting of the Action Group for Syria in Geneva.

General
Assembly
Document

3 August 2012
A/RES/66/253
B

This resolution deplored the Security Council's failure to act on Syria and called for a political transition.

Human Rights
Council
Document

16 August
2012
A/HRC/21/50

This report was by the Commission of Inquiry on Syria.