

December 2013 Monthly Forecast

 securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2013-12/syria_2.php

Posted 27 November 2013

Download Complete Forecast: [PDF](#)

MIDDLE EAST

Syria

Expected Council Action

In December, Council members will be briefed in consultations on the implementation of [resolution 2118](#), which required the verifiable destruction of Syria's chemical weapons. Sigrid Kaag, Special Coordinator of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-UN Joint Mission, will likely brief.

There will also be a briefing in consultations by Valerie Amos, the head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), on implementation of the 2 October [presidential statement](#) on humanitarian access in Syria.

Council members will also be closely following preparations for the 22 January 2014 Geneva II peace talks.

Key Recent Developments

On 5 November, Kaag briefed Council members on the work of the OPCW-UN Joint Mission. She reported that 21 of 23 declared sites had been inspected. (Syria reported that the two remaining sites were abandoned. One was later inspected on 6 November, and the remaining site will be inspected when security conditions allow.)

On 15 November, the OPCW approved a plan to destroy Syria's chemical weapons stockpile outside Syrian territory. Albania and Norway were approached to host destruction activities, but both declined and no other country has been identified. The OPCW decision set several deadlines for destruction activities. Most critical chemical substances should be removed by 31 December and the remainder by 5 February 2014. Following removal from Syria, critical substances are to be destroyed by 31 March 2014 and the remaining materiel by 30 June 2014. Meanwhile, the OPCW reported that 60 percent of Syrian chemical weapons munitions had been verified as destroyed, with the remainder due for destruction by 31 January 2014. Chemical weapons facilities in Syria should be razed by 15 March 2014.

Separately, the final report of a UN team led by Åke Sellström to investigate the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria is expected in early December.

On 4 November, Amos briefed Council members on humanitarian access in Syria. She reiterated her deep disappointment that access had not improved and there had been no major breakthrough in getting Syria to lift bureaucratic obstacles. Amos stressed the need for the cessation of the assault on medical care, more predictable processing by Syria of

visas for humanitarian workers, efficient customs clearance procedures for humanitarian supplies, facilitation of field missions and authorisation for additional humanitarian hubs. She also said Syria should allow aid to directly reach those in need, i.e., not to require that all aid be centrally routed through Damascus for redistribution. She reemphasised the importance of individual Council members using sustained political leverage with parties on the ground to persuade them to allow the evacuation of civilians from siege areas, facilitate access in hard-to-reach areas and agree to regular humanitarian pauses.

At press time, the first meeting of a high-level contact group of 20 member states on humanitarian access was set for 26 November in Geneva. The group will be co-chaired by OCHA, Australia and Luxembourg and will include P5 representatives. It may also include Germany, Italy, Iran, Kuwait, Norway, Qatar and neighbouring countries Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. It was unclear whether Saudi Arabia would participate. The group was established to provide a practical mechanism through which OCHA could raise specific issues in order to have the necessary political pressure applied to get expedited and unhindered access.

On 3 November, Arab League foreign ministers met in Cairo and emphasised that the Geneva II peace talks should lead to the establishment of a transitional governing body with full executive powers in line with the communiqué agreed at the original 30 June 2012 Geneva conference. There was also agreement on the need for humanitarian access and a call for the Arab Group at the UN to take forward a draft resolution on the issue in the Security Council.

At the Cairo meeting, the Syrian National Council said that agreement on the transfer of executive power was a requirement for its participation at Geneva II. However, after a fractious meeting in Istanbul on 9-11 November, the Syrian opposition voted to attend peace talks on the condition of full humanitarian access and the release of prisoners. The vote was taken under intense pressure from the US and EU states, which underscored that without a swift political solution, Syria faced a long future under President Bashar al-Assad along with the rise of extremist groups.

On 14 November, Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke with Assad, urging him to alleviate civilian suffering and to send a delegation to the Geneva II talks. On 19 November, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that fighting terrorism in Syria should be the priority for the peace talks, not changing regimes. On 21 November, Assad vowed to continue the government's military operations.

On 5 and 25 November, UN-Arab League Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi convened trilateral meetings with Russia and the US in Geneva. There was no agreement following the 5 November trilateral on the parameters of peace talks. However, the date of 22 January 2014 was set following the 25 November meeting. Another trilateral is scheduled for 20 December when it is hoped Russia, the US and the UN would agree on the composition of the opposition and government delegations and whether Iran and Saudi Arabia would participate. There remain major disagreements over the future role of Assad.

The General Assembly's Third Committee passed a resolution, drafted by Saudi Arabia, on 19 November condemning human rights violations in Syria, in particular attacks against medical facilities. It urged the Council to take measures to end violations in Syria and stressed the need for immediate action to facilitate humanitarian access. Finally, it called for peace talks to be convened as soon as possible to implement the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012.

Key Issues

The key issue for the Council is how to take the unprecedented cooperation on the chemical weapons track and translate that momentum into tangible benefits for civilians on the ground, such as significantly lowering levels of violence and greater humanitarian access.

Underlying Problem

The progress on the chemical weapons track has not altered the course of the civil war in Syria. The level of violence continues unabated with more than 100,000 killed; some monitoring groups put the death toll at 115,000. The humanitarian situation is devastating. The growing refugee population now numbers 2.24 million, and 9.3 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance (2.5 million of these cannot be accessed by humanitarian workers and another 6.5 million are internally displaced). Adding to the dire situation are the challenges of winter, alarming predictions of starvation in towns under siege, a collapsing health infrastructure under deliberate attack and a confirmed polio outbreak.

Options

Aside from hearing Kaag's briefing on the chemical weapons track and from Amos on humanitarian access, another option includes a briefing from Brahimi on the details of the preparations for the Geneva II peace talks.

Following reports that Syria does not view the 2 October presidential statement as binding, a further option for the Council is to adopt a resolution on humanitarian issues if cooperation does not improve dramatically in the near term. The substance would not need to be different from what the Council has already agreed in other outcomes.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Many Council members have pointed out that the lack of Syrian cooperation on implementing the presidential statement on humanitarian access stands in stark contrast to the government's compliance with resolution 2118 on chemical weapons. This has led to the troubling conclusion among most Council members that delays on humanitarian access are political in nature rather than due to the lack of institutional or technical capacity to facilitate humanitarian relief operations, as Syria claims.

Some Council members are considering a humanitarian resolution as a possible next step. But the immediate focus for Council members is to see if they can act on Amos's calls for the use of bilateral political leverage to improve access. Also, Russia is unlikely to develop an appetite for a Syria-focused resolution.

Council members also see a potential positive peace dividend if humanitarian conditions can be improved on the ground. Such improvement could be a significant confidence-building measure in advance of the Geneva II peace talks. In this context, Council members are aware of Russia's position and feel it is important to avoid contentious negotiations in order to allow a limited period of time for the Syrian government to comply with the presidential statement.

Council members are aware that the recent thaw in diplomatic relations between the US and Iran, and the 24 November agreement between the P5+1 with Iran on its nuclear programme could ease regional tensions. However, the struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia for regional influence will continue to have the potential to make progress on the Syrian situation difficult. Most Council members, while recognising the relationship between progress on the Iran nuclear file and Geneva II talks, are nevertheless cautious to link the two processes too closely together. At this early stage, Council members are wary about forecasting whether there will be any immediate, positive impacts from the nuclear agreement on Syria.

On the chemical weapons track, some Council members remain sceptical about the reliability of Syria's declared arsenal and are wary of providing financial support for the provision of armoured vehicles, advanced communications systems and other dual-use equipment requested by Syria ostensibly to transport chemical weapons out of the country. However, Council members are broadly agreed that at this juncture the OPCW is the best forum to find solutions for these concerns.

France is the penholder on Syria. However, most texts are thoroughly negotiated between Russia and the US prior to agreement by the broader Council. Australia and Luxembourg have taken the lead on the humanitarian track.

UN Documents

Security Council Resolutions

<u>27 September 2013</u> <u>S/RES/2118</u>	This resolution was adopted unanimously by the Council and requires the verification and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles, calls for the convening of the Geneva II peace talks and endorses the establishment of a transitional governing body in Syria with full executive powers.
---	--

Security Council Presidential Statements

<u>2 October 2013</u> <u>S/PRST/2013/15</u>	This statement was on humanitarian access in Syria and urged the government to take immediate steps to allow for expanded relief operations and lift bureaucratic obstacles.
--	--

General Assembly Documents

19 November 2013
A/C.3/68/L.42/Rev.1

A Third Committee resolution that condemned human rights violations in Syria and urged the Security Council to take measures to end violations there. It was drafted by Saudi Arabia and was passed by 123 votes in favor, 13 against and 46 abstentions.