

I. Impact on COVID-19 on Peace and Security

Recent Developments

In the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges evaluated at the outset remain. However, new challenges became apparent as the pandemic unfolded. On 26 February 2021, the Security Council adopted resolution 2565 (2021) on "Maintenance of international peace and security", which constitutes the second thematic resolution on the COVID-19 pandemic adopted by the council.¹ It addresses the issue of equitable access to vaccination against COVID-19 particularly in armed conflicts and post-conflict situations and recognizes extensive immunization against COVID-19 as a global public good in the area of health.² Furthermore, it calls for multilateral approaches and international cooperation to facilitate equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, particularly through the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX), and stresses the need to develop international partnerships to scale up manufacturing and distribution capabilities in recognition of different national contexts.³ At the same time, the Security Council reiterated its demand for a general and immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations on the agenda, as voiced in its previous resolution 2535 (2020) on "Maintenance of international peace and security", and demands safe and unhindered delivery of COVID-19 vaccination in areas of armed conflict.⁴ The COVID-19 pandemic remained high on the agenda of the Security Council with closed consultations on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2535 (2020) and 2565 (2021) on 26 July and 13 December 2021.⁵

The Security Council addressed the long-term consequences and post-pandemic recovery in vulnerable situations, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international governance: On 24 September 2020, the UN Security Council held a high summit-level debate on the theme "Maintenance of international peace and security: Global governance after COVID-19" dealing with how the Security Council ought to respond to the potential changes in the international security environment as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶ On 19 May 2021, the UN Security Council held a high-level open debate on "Peace and Security in Africa: Addressing root causes of conflict while promoting post-pandemic recovery in Africa" to explore ways to understand the challenges of post-pandemic recovery and to help African Member States advance with post-pandemic recovery.⁷ A Presidential Statement was issued.⁸ Complementing this, the thematic and country-specific resolutions underlined the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to implement the demands of Security Council resolution 2565 (2021).⁹

Despite the call for a global ceasefire, armed conflict continued worldwide in 2020 and 2021.¹⁰ In conflict and post-conflict situations, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to intensify human suffering and represents an enormous pressure on health care systems¹¹ The Security Council acknowledged that the pandemic is exacerbating existing conflict drivers.¹² Therefore, crucial questions remain to be

¹ UN Security Council, *Maintenance of international peace and security (S/RES/2565 (2021))*, 2021.

² UN Security Council, *Maintenance of international peace and security (S/RES/2565 (2021))*, 2021.

³ UN Security Council, *Maintenance of international peace and security (S/RES/2565 (2021))*, 2021.

⁴ UN Security Council, *Maintenance of international peace and security (S/RES/2532 (2020))*, 2020; UN Security Council, *Maintenance of international peace and security (S/RES/2565 (2021))*, 2021.

⁵ UN Security Council, *VTCs, and meetings of the Security Council members and outcomes in 2020-2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic*, 2021.

⁶ UN Security Council, *Letter dated 03 September 2020 from the Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2020/833)*, 2020.

⁷ UN Security Council, *Letter dated 02 May 2021 from the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2021/420)*, 2021.

⁸ United Nations Security Council, *Statement by the President of the Security Council (S/PRST/2021/10)*, 2021.

⁹ See for example: UN Security Council, *The situation in Syria (S/RES/2585(2021))*, 2021; UN Security Council, *Children and Armed Conflict (S/RES/2601(2021))*, 2021.

¹⁰ UN Security Council, *Protection of civilians in armed conflict. Report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/423)*, 2021.

¹¹ UN Security Council, *Protection of civilians in armed conflict. Report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/423)*, 2021.

¹² UN Security Council, *Statement by the President of the Security Council (S/PRST/2021/10)*, 2021.

addressed on how to alleviate human suffering in armed conflicts, mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and regain momentum on the global ceasefire call.¹³

Since the development of COVID-19 vaccines, the question of equitable distribution has been at the focus of international debate – also because the emergence of new viral variants such as Omicron has demonstrated the urgent need for global herd immunity.¹⁴ This focus on vaccine distribution has been taken up by the Security Council, particularly regarding armed conflict and post-conflict situations. A central controversial issue the Security Council also acknowledged is the ongoing discussions on a potential patent waiver for COVID-19 vaccines.¹⁵ Despite international efforts, vaccination supplies and quotas are relatively low in many conflict-affected and post-conflict states: As of mid-January 2022, Yemen, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, Cameroon, and Haiti had received only enough vaccine doses to vaccinate between 3% and 5% of its population.¹⁶ In Mali, Niger, and Sudan, the vaccine doses are only sufficient to vaccinate up to 10% of the population.¹⁷ It is expected that at the current rate of available vaccines, African states will not reach the threshold of 70% of the population being vaccinated until August 2024.¹⁸ Central issues to be addressed are how to increase efforts to accelerate the COVAX initiative, enhance the capacity of countries affected by conflict to administer the vaccine and improve access to vaccines in armed conflict situations.¹⁹

As the pandemic continues to progress, many challenges such as the mitigation of conflict exacerbation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, equitable access to and successful administration of vaccines in vulnerable environments, and post-pandemic recovery remain high on the agenda. Consequently, many issue areas regarding the topic at hand require intensified action to be taken by the Security Council, while bearing in mind its mandate. Echoing the words of the Secretary-General, the COVID-19 pandemic constitutes a key priority of action throughout the entire UN system in 2022 – and this applies equally to the Security Council.²⁰

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¹³ Security Council Report, *Consultations on the Implementation of Resolutions 2532 and 2565 on COVID-19*, 2021.

¹⁴ See for example: UN HRC, *Ensuring equitable, affordable, timely and universal access for all countries to vaccines in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic (A/HRC/RES/46/14 (2021))*, 2021; UN General Assembly, *Ensuring equitable, affordable, timely and universal access for all countries to vaccines in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic (A/RES/76/175 (2021))*, 2021.

¹⁵ United Nations Security Council, *Statement by the President of the Security Council (S/PRST/2021/10)*, 2021; UN Department of Global Communications, *Issuing Presidential Statement, Security Council Expresses Concern about Devastating Impact of COVID-19 on Africa, Urges Greater Cooperation*, 2021.

¹⁶ UN OCHA, *COVID-19 Data Explorer: Global Humanitarian Operations*, 2022.

¹⁷ UN OCHA, *COVID-19 Data Explorer: Global Humanitarian Operations*, 2022.

¹⁸ UN Department of Global Communications, *UN chief calls for action to put out '5-alarm global fire'*, 2022.

¹⁹ Security Council Report, *Consultations on the Implementation of Resolutions 2532 and 2565 on COVID-19*, 2021.

²⁰ UN Department of Global Communications, *UN chief calls for action to put out '5-alarm global fire'*, 2022.

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II. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts

Recent Developments

Protection of Civilians (POC) in armed conflicts has been one of the topics of utmost importance for the United Nations (UN) Security Council and its Member States. Be it Afghanistan, the Tigray region of Ethiopia, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen, or elsewhere, casualties of vulnerable civilian groups including medical, humanitarian, and media personnel have been reported continuously. As stated in a report of the Secretary-General on POC published on 3 May 2021, there have been 6,766 reported casualties of civilians by explosives of all kinds. This is a decrease of 43% in 2020 compared to 2019 possibly due to the COVID -19 pandemic and ceasefires in Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic.¹ In many conflict regions especially crucial infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, markets, airports, water and sanitation facilities have been destroyed or damaged resulting in long-term difficulties for the local civilian population to access necessities.² Furthermore, due to the extensive use of explosive weaponry in populated areas, 88% of fatalities were civilians.³ This compares to 16% in other, less populated areas.⁴ The use of explosives has worsened the access to infrastructure necessary to contain infectious disease outbreaks, including COVID-19.⁵

Additionally, food insecurity is also affected by armed conflict. Conflict and insecurity are driving factors in driving hunger: Over 99 million people in 23 Member States most affected by armed conflicts suffered from a lack of food security. Due to the displacement of smallholder farmers and the destruction of the natural environment, stable production is at risk and could threaten whole regions. This also leads to a spike in food prices, which makes it impossible for the already troubled civilian population to feed themselves.⁶

Considering the circumstances of the COVID -19 pandemic, the Security Council issued a presidential statement on 29 April 2020.⁷ In this statement, the Security Council recalled the previously established link between armed conflicts and food insecurity. The obligation under international humanitarian law to allow access and assistance to humanitarian personnel to affected civilian populations and the importance of the inclusion of women was reiterated. Finally, the Security Council has encouraged the Secretary-General to present more data in his reports to the Security Council to further assess the situation.⁸

The Security Council further developed its ideas on POC in resolution 2573 (2021), which was adopted unanimously.⁹ The document especially highlights the influence of establishing military positions in densely-populated areas, as well as the threatening and use of essential infrastructure and indispensable civilian objects for the survival of the civilian population in times of warfare.¹⁰ Furthermore, it establishes that those acts are seen as a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law mainly because of their long-term devastating humanitarian effects, and that conflict parties should distinguish between civilian populations, objects, and any other persons or objects afforded protection and combatants and military objectives.¹¹ The Security Council not only highlighted the aforementioned issues once again but also

¹ UN Security Council. *Report of the Secretary-General on the Protection of Civilians (S/2021/423)*, 2021.

² UN Security Council. *Report of the Secretary-General on the Protection of Civilians (S/2021/423)*, 2021.

³ UN Security Council. *Report of the Secretary-General on the Protection of Civilians (S/2021/423)*, 2021.

⁴ Action on Armed Violence. *Explosive Violence Monitor*, 2020, p. 6.

⁵ Action on Armed Violence. *Explosive Violence Monitor*, 2020, p. 6.

⁶ Action on Armed Violence. *Explosive Violence Monitor*, 2020, p. 6.

⁷ UN Security Council. *Statement by the President of the Security Council (S/PRST/2020/6)*, 2020.

⁸ UN Security Council. *Statement by the President of the Security Council (S/PRST/2020/6)*, 2020.

⁹ UN Security Council. *Letter dated 27 April 2021 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2021/407)*, 2021.

¹⁰ UN Security Council. 8778th meeting. *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts (S/RES/2573 (2021))*. 2021.

¹¹ UN Security Council. 8778th meeting. *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts (S/RES/2573 (2021))*. 2021.

broadened the concept of POC to include the protection of essential infrastructure for civilians, and therefore condemns warfare that targets such infrastructure or employs other methods to pressure the civilians in a conflict situation.

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