

WHAT'S IN BLUE

Insights on the work of the UN Security Council

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Consultations on the Liberia Sanctions Regime

On Monday morning (16 June), Ambassador Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein (Jordan), the chair of the 1521 Liberia Sanctions Committee, is expected to brief members on the Liberia sanctions regime. The briefing is expected to cover the Committee's activities over the past six months and the midterm report of the Panel of Experts (PoE) that assists the Committee. It additionally takes place in the context of a mandated review of the sanctions regime, which was to be conducted by June "with a view to modifying or lifting all or parts" of the sanctions, according to resolution 2128 of 10 December 2013. No action, however, is expected at this time in the Council or Committee that would change the sanctions.

When the Committee last met on 16 May, members were briefed by the PoE on the midterm report (S/2014/363), and discussed the sanctions review. Apparently P5 members expressed support for ending the sanctions regime in December. France and the UK appear most keen on concluding the longstanding regime, in place since 22 December 2003, and while the US is supportive of the idea, its position is more cautious. Earlier in the year, also in accordance with resolution 2128, the US submitted proposals to the Committee for delisting various individuals and entities from asset freezes and travel bans, but this process has been held up by another permanent member.

The Committee chair will likely make observations about the latest PoE midterm report. While the report does not confirm any new sanctions violations, it reveals systematic governance weaknesses, especially related to the security sector: a still volatile border with Côte d'Ivoire and insufficient cooperation between the two governments to address border threats, a failure to adopt national legislation to regulate arms and a lack of any national legislation to prosecute drug trafficking which has been rising in Liberia. Recent attacks in Côte d'Ivoire near the joint border, the upcoming 2015 national elections in Côte d'Ivoire, and the recent scale back of the Côte d'Ivoire sanctions regime could potentially impact Liberia, and may affect Council members' consideration of the Liberia sanctions regime, as they contemplate how to wind it down.

In light of these issues, some elected members are more cautious about ending the sanctions. An issue that has been raised, and which seems to be widely accepted, is the importance of maintaining a mechanism that can monitor arms trafficking in Liberia if the sanctions regime is ended. This is currently done by the PoE, which presumably would be disbanded. Some members may inquire about options in this regard. Ideas that have been floated include a possible role for UNMIL or having the PoE continue its work in some form even after the sanctions are lifted.

Some members might also express concern over Liberia's failure to adopt the Firearms Control Act, which the PoE has recommended should be adopted before lifting the arms embargo since there does not exist a legal framework for the government to regulate arms and ammunition. Additionally, in last month's committee meeting, it was suggested that an assessment mission could be deployed to Liberia to identify options for the Council for providing Liberia support to control or regulate arms if sanctions are lifted.

Next week, following Monday's consultations, the US may convene an informal meeting of Council experts on Liberia sanctions to discuss such options and issues in further detail.

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