Strategic Summary

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Over the last year, multilateral political missions have played a central role in international crisis management. United Nations missions have supported elections in Libya, tackled coups in West Africa and attempted to find a solution to Syria’s civil war. In a year in which the overall numbers of troops deployed in UN and non-UN peace operations declined, the pressure on political missions to manage complex peace processes increased. This trend is likely to continue in the year ahead. However, many political missions continue to face financial constraints and security concerns that limit their impact.

In the last twelve months the number of political missions fielded by international organizations has increased slightly from 66 to 67. While the number of missions deployed by the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and Organization of American States (OAS) have largely stayed static, in the same period the African Union (AU) increased its liaison offices by seventeen percent (from 12 in 2011 to 14 offices in 2012). While organizations have dedicated increasing focus to the utility of political missions for crisis management, these missions are operating under increasing budgetary and staffing pressures.

Budget requirements for UN political missions decreased six percent overall between 2011 and 2012, with significant decreases in some of the UN’s largest political missions – including in Afghanistan (10.5%) and Iraq (16.8%). UN political missions also operate under inflexible financing arrangements that leave less room for quick responses and fewer funds for mission start up, without access to special funding arrangements available to the UN’s military missions.

Against this backdrop, the 2011 review by the Secretary-General, which offered a number of recommendations to improve funding and backstopping mechanisms for political missions, provides an opportunity to strengthen political missions in the face of increasing budget restraints. In 2011, member states failed to come to an agreement on how to ease political missions’ current reliance on the regular budget. The five permanent members of the Security Council in particular objected to proposals for separate funding mechanisms for

Political Missions Deployed by Organization (2011 and 2012)

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political missions, fearing that they would have to pay a higher percentage for a separate account, as is the case with the peacekeeping budget. Given the prevailing financial constraints that affect member states, it is unclear whether the Secretary-General’s proposal will gain traction. However, the General Assembly and Security Council’s stated commitments to strengthening conflict prevention and mediation throughout 2012 may be positive signals toward renewed willingness to tackle the issue. Still, recommendations to ease political missions’ current reliance on the regular budget, through for example establishing special accounts for funding, are likely to continue to be met by questions from member states.

Staffing shortages also impact the ability of missions to implement their mandated tasks, though vacancy levels have improved since last year for the majority of missions. The situation is particularly acute in regional offices, whose broad mandates cover prevention activities in individual countries as well as support to wider initiatives against regional threats, with a small team of experts. For instance, as of 31 July the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) operates with nine staff members, out of an authorized 30. While UNRCCA’s vacancy rate (70%) is the highest among UN political missions, the UN struggles with rapidly filling authorized posts, partially due to budgetary issues.

Notwithstanding these continuing pressures, political missions in the last year have grappled with rapidly unfolding regional developments requiring swift political action.

**MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA**

The dynamics of the Arab Spring prompted a wave of democratic uprisings throughout the Middle East and North Africa that resulted in regime transitions in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen, and prompted two of the UN’s highest profile civilian missions to engage in events in Libya and Syria.

In Libya after the fall of the Gaddafi regime, the UN deployed the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), with a wide ranging mandate which, among its other activities provided support for the preparation and conduct of the July 2012 parliamentary elections, the country’s first democratic elections after decades of authoritarian rule. UNSMIL was initially authorized in September 2011 under a three-month mandate to provide immediate support to national authorities at their request and to allow the UN time to engage with Libyan authorities to determine the shape of a longer-term mission. However, the formation of an interim government was delayed, thus limiting UNSMIL’s ability to work with national counterparts, and the mission was provided a three month extension. This mandate also expanded the

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**Number of Personnel in UN SPMs by Region: 31 July 2012**

![Number of Personnel in UN SPMs by Region: 31 July 2012](image1)

**Number of UN SPMs by Region:**

**31 July 2012**

![Number of UN SPMs by Region](image2)
mission’s activities to provide assistance to authorities in combating weapons proliferation, particularly man-portable air-defense systems. In his address to the Security Council prior to UNSMIL’s renewal in March, this time for one year, UNSMIL’s then head Ian Martin stressed the mission’s phased approach to ensure that it is responding to needs articulated by Libyans “in a flexible manner, which does not impose a heavy international presence.”

In 2012, UNSMIL provided technical advice to the government in the area of security sector reform (SSR) and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of militia members. The need for a comprehensive SSR/DDR strategy has become apparent through the increasingly volatile security situation. Violent clashes occurred between factions of the various militia groups, but attacks have also been launched against the international community, including on the convoy of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Libya and the 11 September attack against the US Consulate in Benghazi that killed the US Ambassador and three other US consulate staff members.

UNSMIL has employed a light footprint to provide advice and support to the Libyan government. It is one of the first to integrate the findings of the 2011 UN international civilian capacity review, prioritizing flexible staffing and funding approaches to improve the recruitment of appropriate and needed expertise.

In February, after months of violence in Syria between state security forces, irregular pro-government militias and anti-government groups, the UN and the Arab League named former Secretary-General Kofi Annan their joint Special Envoy for Syria. Annan set up an office in Geneva with 18 staff 7 – a large team for a UN envoy – and was supported by deputies representing the UN (Jean-Marie Guéhenno) and the League (Nasser Al Kidwa). In March Annan presented a six-point peace plan calling for a cessation of violence and Syrian-led talks towards a political transition.

The Syrian military temporarily reduced its operations in April, but did not halt them altogether. The Security Council mandated the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) to observe the security situation, but there was renewed violence while the observers deployed. UNSMIS was a peacekeeping operation directed from New York and was not under Annan’s authority, raising questions about the exact relationship between the UN’s political and peacekeeping roles in Syria. This was underlined in June when UNSMIS – having initially provided effective reporting on incidents including the Houla massacre – had to suspend operations due to security concerns.

In June and July with a significant deterioration of the security situation on the ground, Annan’s relations with the Syrian government and rebels worsened. The permanent five members of the Security Council clashed frequently over the crisis, despite agreeing to new proposals set out by Annan for a political transition in late June. In July, China and Russia vetoed a Security Council resolution threatening the Syrian government with penalties if it continued to use heavy weapons. Annan resigned as Special Envoy in August and UNSMIS closed down in the same month. Annan was succeeded by Lakhdar Brahimi, who took office on 1 September.

The crisis has heightened tensions throughout the region. In October, Turkey and Syria exchanged sustained artillery and mortar fire across the border. In Lebanon, incidents of violence have already spilled over across the border. The UN’s Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the Special Envoy for the Implementation of Resolution 1559 have both noted the high risks the Syrian crisis poses for Lebanon’s stability. Clashes between supporters and opponents of the Syrian government in Beirut in August killed twelve people, highlighting the risk of an escalation of the conflict in the lead up to the 2013 elections.

In Iraq, the UN Assistance Mission remains one of the UN’s largest political missions. In August 2011 Martin Kobler was appointed the new Special Representative to the Secretary-General for Iraq. Since taking office, Kobler has expressed concern over the continued political stalemate and rising sectarian tensions. Deep divisions among the political elite, including the death sentence verdict in the trial in absentia of Vice President al-Hashimi, have led to a near breakdown of political dialogue. These political challenges are occurring against the backdrop of rising sectarian tensions and persistent violence since the departure of US troops in December 2011. In 2012, UNAMI facilitated the appointment process of the new Board of the Independent High Electoral Commission, tasked with organizing provincial and parliamentary elections in 2013 and 2014. The mission also continued to advocate the adoption of outstanding constitutional legislation, including for
the creation of the Federal Council, the upper house of the legislature. UNAMI also facilitated a peaceful and durable solution to the relocation of Iranian exiles in Camp Ashraf, including the relocation of residents to a temporary transit facility in Iraq, monitoring the humanitarian and human rights situation and, with UNHCR, the resettlement of recognized refugees to third countries. The mission continued to meet with key actors in Iraq and Kuwait on resolving outstanding issues between the two states, and it created an internal UNAMI taskforce to facilitate the adoption of an oil and gas law, which has been much-delayed due to disputes over revenue sharing and the demarcation of internal boundaries.

In Yemen, a year of protests finally yielded the ouster of President Ali Abdullah Saleh in February 2012 through a Gulf Cooperation Council initiative supported by the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General, Jamal Benomar. Since April 2011, Benomar had made frequent trips to the country to verify the implementation of this initiative and oversee upcoming presidential elections and the institution of a democratic political process. He works closely with political leaders and regional actors to resolve political stalemates and prevent the former regime from hindering progress. Benomar had established a reputation in the Yemeni government as an effective impartial mediator, and in June the Secretary-General decided to deploy a field-based political mission, the UN Office in Yemen, to support the Special Adviser’s good offices function. In August, Benomar’s position was elevated to the level of Assistant Secretary-General.

The UN and EU Special Coordinators for the Middle East Peace Process continue to provide support for a comprehensive peace agreement despite the lack of progress made in adhering to the timeline proposed by the Middle East Quartet (comprised of the UN, EU, US and Russia) for an agreement by the end of 2012.

These presences undertake a wide spectrum of activities, from engaging in mediation efforts between conflict parties, a primary task of the Joint AU-UN Chief Mediator for Darfur, to combating terrorism, as, for example, is the case with the UN Regional Office for Central Africa’s (UNOCA) efforts to help combat the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). These offices often work in close collaboration with each other; and UNOCA’s LRA activities are conducted alongside the AU’s Special Envoy and Task Force on the LRA under the aegis of a regional plan.

In 2012, UNOCA also enhanced its cooperation with the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and other UN presences in the sub-region, including the two political missions in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Burundi. These entities coordinate efforts to strengthen national and sub-regional conflict prevention mechanisms and to address the growing trend of election related violence.

The UN Integrated Peace-building Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA) grapples with the presence of a Chadian rebel group and the LRA in CAR that pose serious security risks and threaten peace consolidation efforts, including the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of former Central African Republic rebel fighters. BINUCA continues to support the implementation of the national DDR strategy and wider security sector reform efforts and assists the government in raising funding for these efforts from the international community. The UN Office in Burundi (BNUB), which will transition into a UN Country Team presence with a focus on economic development over the next year, continues its institution building efforts, including in the judiciary and the security sectors. BNUB also supports reconciliation efforts between the government and opposition parties and other areas of democratic progress – an area of tension between the government and the UN Office in the past. Since the appointment of Karin Landgren as Special Representative for Liberia, BNUB is headed by Parfait Onanga-Anyanga.

Collaboration between offices also extends across regions: UNOCA, along with ECCAS and the AU, engages with the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and ECOWAS on tackling the threat of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea through the formulation of a regional strategy.

UNOWA further engaged with ECOWAS, UN agencies and the International Criminal Police

**AFRICA**

With eight United Nations field based missions, including two offices with regional mandates, 14 African Union Liaison Offices and numerous political envoys from ECOWAS and the EU, in 2012 Africa remains the continent with the highest concentration of political missions.

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Organization (INTERPOL) to fight the rise of drug trafficking and international organized crime in West Africa. To this end, UNOWA supported the extension of the West Africa Coast Initiative, a regional strategy to combat these threats, to include Guinea in April, and worked to reinforce greater political and operational engagement with international partners including INTERPOL and the EU. Progress was also made in the design of an ECOWAS counter-terrorism strategy.

In early 2012, the absence of robust democratic structures in West Africa came to the fore with successive military coups in Mali and Guinea-Bissau. ECOWAS acted swiftly to address the unconstitutional changes in government in both countries, including through the appointment of special envoys.

Following the 22 March coup in Mali, ECOWAS named President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso as mediator for the crisis with the mandate to interact with relevant stakeholders and engage them in dialogue. Combined mediation efforts by Compaore and the head of UNOWA, Said Djinnit, led to the establishment of a transitional framework and the appointment of a unity government in August. ECOWAS has pursued a military intervention to address the ongoing Islamist insurgency in the country’s north and in October the UN Security Council declared its readiness to respond to Mali’s request for an international military force. ECOWAS Envoy Compaore and UNOWA head Djinnit will continue to engage with national, regional and international stakeholders to forge a sustainable political solution to end the crisis in Mali’s north.

Their efforts will be further supported by the UN Special Envoy to the Sahel, Romano Prodi, appointed in October to address challenges in the region.

In Guinea-Bissau the army overthrew the interim government on 12 April. Following a dispute over the inconclusive presidential election held in March, ECOWAS had already appointed Guinean president Alpha Condé as mediator for the electoral crisis. In the wake of the coup, ECOWAS also headed mediation efforts to restore constitutional order, which led to the junta conceding power to a transitional civilian government on 23 May.

While ECOWAS took the notable lead in addressing tensions following the March elections and the subsequent military coup, the role of the UN Integrated Peace-Building Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) was limited to a coordination function to harmonize positions on and efforts toward the return to constitutional order among key national and international stakeholders. These efforts also aim at enhancing inclusive dialogue among national stakeholders. The African Union Liaison Office in Guinea-Bissau supports UNIOGBIS in these efforts.

In February, following a request by the government, the Secretary-General withdrew his Executive Representative (ERSG) for the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL), Michael von der Schulenburg, who had held the post since 2008. Relations between the government and von der Schulenburg, once good, had deteriorated leading to his departure. The
immediate focus for UNIPSIL, since May under the leadership of ERSG Jens Toyberg-Frandzen, is on supporting a non-violent and credible electoral process for the November presidential and legislative and local council elections. Pending the peaceful conduct and acceptance of the elections, UNIPSIL will begin preparations for a transition to a UN Country Team presence, most probably by the end of 2013.

**Somalia** made some important strides toward stabilization in 2012. In January, following military advances by the UN-backed African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) against Al Shabaab that improved the security situation, the UN Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS) moved its headquarters to Mogadishu after 17 years in Nairobi, Kenya. As of August, UNPOS has deployed 40 out of 90 national and international personnel inside Somalia. While the mission expects to be able to relocate 12 additional international staff members in the course of the year, following the construction of additional accommodations and office space, the volatile security situation continues to impede staff mobility throughout the area of operations. In August and September, the Somali National Constituent Assembly adopted a new constitution and elected a president. UNPOS will continue to support national efforts in achieving the next steps in finalizing the transition period, including the appointment of an executive government. The EU, through its Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, continues to address the regional dimensions of Somalia’s conflict, including maritime piracy. With the end of the transition period, the UN plans an interagency review of its presence in Somalia for the second part of 2012, with the view of beginning a new peacebuilding phase.

**Europe**

Both the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the European Union remain actively involved in the Western Balkans, the Caucasus and Moldova. The OSCE remains the biggest institutional player with ten presences across the region. The OSCE works alongside and often in close cooperation with the EU, which is represented through six high and special representatives (EUSRs) and also operates a Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina** (BiH) the coalition government that was only established in February (following a 14-month stalemate) collapsed in June over disagreement over the budget. Full implementation of the “5+2 agenda” that lays out requirements that need to be met to fulfill the civilian aspects of the Dayton Peace agreement remains elusive. The Office of the High Representative, responsible for overseeing the agreement’s implementation, will remain in the country until the government has completed these steps. The OSCE mission and EUSR meanwhile will continue their respective work in consolidating BiH’s democratic institutions and providing political facilitation with a focus on EU integration.

September marked the end of a four-year supervised independence period for **Kosovo** and the departure of the International Civilian Representative who assisted the authorities in implementing much of the Ahtisaari peace plan, and supported Kosovo’s status settlement and integration into the EU. However, Serbia, along with other members of the international community, objects to Kosovo’s independence and tensions, particularly in the Kosovo’s Serb-dominated north, run high. The UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) liaises between Pristina and Belgrade and coordinates its work with the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OMIK) and the EU Rule of Law Mission (EULEX). OMIK promotes and protects human rights, supports building democratic institutions and good governance and provides assistance in strengthening the security and public safety sectors, while EULEX builds capacity of rule of law institutions. In May, OMIK played an important role in reducing tensions by providing technical assistance to enable Serbs living in northern Kosovo to vote in the Serbian elections. Despite UNMIK’s engagement with Serbian leaders in northern Kosovo to improve relations with EULEX, the authorities continued to deny the EU mission full access to the region.

In early 2012, ethnic tension in the **Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** (FYROM) increased in response to the death of two ethnic Albanians, which triggered further killings and gang violence. The OSCE Mission to Skopje strongly condemned actions of inter-ethnic violence and welcomed the authorities’ response to calm the situation. The mission continues its efforts to aid implementation of the 2001 Ohrid peace accord through police reform, strengthening good governance and the rule of law.

In **Albania, Serbia and Montenegro** the OSCE promotes democratization, the rule of law and human and minority rights. In Albania, the mission provided support to electoral reform and technical assistance to the Central Election Commission ahead of the 2012 presidential elections, which took place in June.
The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan intensified in mid-2012 with a rise in casualties along the border and heated rhetoric between the two countries. The OSCE coordinates efforts to solve the conflict through the “Minsk Process,” jointly co-chaired by France, Russia and the US. Its special envoy based in Georgia maintains regular contact with all sides together with the co-chairs to discuss developments at the line of contact between Karabakhi and Azerbaijani armed forces. The EU has a presence in the region through its Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia. In Georgia, the EUSR co-chairs the Geneva peace talks – currently the only remaining platform for institutionalized dialogue between stakeholders - along with the OSCE and the UN.

After a six-year hiatus, the 5+2 mediation talks on the Moldova - Transdniestria conflict were re-started in November 2011, with a meeting in April yielding agreement on principles and procedures, potentially opening space for progress on substantive issues. In September, the Moldovan and Transdniestrian sides agreed to an intensified meeting schedule to work toward agreement on outstanding issues. The OSCE mission, along with the other 5+2 participants the EU, Russia, Ukraine and USA, continues to facilitate a political settlement of the conflict. The EU’s border assistance mission conducts joint border patrols and provides technical assistance to Moldovan and Ukrainian authorities.

ASIA

In Myanmar, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General, Vijay Nambiar, provides good offices and leads the UN’s political engagement. In January, Nambiar was appointed the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General after holding the position in an acting capacity for two years. The past year has seen fundamental political changes in Myanmar. Historic parliamentary by-elections in April saw the election of Aung Sang Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD), with the NLD becoming the largest opposition party in parliament. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made a visit to Myanmar shortly after the elections, announcing that the UN would begin normalizing its development assistance and would support the conduct of the first national census since 1993. Over the past year Nambiar has visited Myanmar a number of times, including a notable trip to Rakhine state shortly after violent ethnic clashes erupted in June. Following the violence Nambiar underscored the UN’s commitment to supporting reconciliation and reform.

The primary focus for international engagement in Central Asia is maintaining stability in the region through Afghanistan’s transition as the International Security Assistance Force prepares to draw down its troops by the end of 2014. The number of violent incidents in July and August underscores continued instability in Afghanistan and challenges for international partners in supporting Afghanistan’s recovery. With ISAF’s departure, UNAMA will take on an increasingly central role at a time when the mission is reassessing its presence and support through the transition process. A 2012 comprehensive review requested by the Security Council and the Government of Afghanistan prompted a reorientation of UNAMA’s provincial offices. When he briefed the Security Council in June, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Hervé Ladsous noted that the Department of Peacekeeping Operation’s proposed budget for UNAMA would reflect reductions requested by member states; however, he cautioned that it was unrealistic to expect the mission to take on more responsibilities during the transition given these resource constraints. Against this backdrop UNAMA is also supporting preparations for the 2014 presidential and 2015 parliamentary elections while continuing its analytical and logistical support for the High Peace Council and, with UNDP, the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration program.

The risks inherent in the Afghanistan transition loom large for political missions in Central Asia. The UN’s Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) highlights trans-boundary risks as its first priority for 2012 – 2014, stressing the risks of terrorism, organized crime and drug trafficking to the Central Asian region. UNRCCA has also assisted in the implementation of the UN’s Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, through a plan of action that was adopted at a high-level meeting in November 2011. In addition to transnational threats, the mission’s other priorities are addressing national crises and limiting their effects on regional stability as well as regional natural resource management in particular as it pertains to water and energy issues in the region.
In addition to the UN’s regional presence, the EU also maintains a Special Representative for Central Asia. The OSCE’s offices in Central Asia continue to provide support for regional security and stability through promoting border management and strengthening national institutions, including support to several electoral processes. The offices are also engaged on a number of transnational issues including combating trafficking, strengthening border management and resolving potential disputes over access to natural resources, particularly water.

**LATIN AMERICA**

The Organization of American States (OAS) maintains two political missions in Latin America. The Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia continues to support to the peace agreement and particularly the rights of those displaced by the conflict. The OAS’s Office in the Adjacency Zone between Belize and Guatemala has asserted that the mission must continue to function at least until the completion of proceedings between the countries at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). However the ICJ’s involvement is contingent upon a favorable outcome in both simultaneous referenda on the issue to be held in Belize and Guatemala in 2013.

**CONCLUSION**

The last year has seen political missions play an increasingly significant role in international security, especially in Africa and the Arab world. Although they have operated in a wide variety of settings, some of the most prominent have engaged in countries either in midst of war or the immediate aftermath of conflict, including Syria, Somalia and Libya. Other, smaller, political missions have faced deteriorating security in cases from Guinea-Bissau to Nagorno-Karabakh. As Richard Gowan and Tristan Dreisbach highlight in their contribution to this report, such cases raise challenging questions about how political missions can function best in periods of major violence.

But the role played by political missions in responding to high-profile conflict also suggests that they are gaining traction as multilateral crisis management mechanisms, continuing a trend identified in previous editions of the Center on International Cooperation’s Review of Political Missions. The 2013 edition of the *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations* will analyze political mission alongside military and police-led peace operations, giving a fuller overview of how multilateral crisis management is evolving.

**NOTES**

1  UN Budget requirements 2011 and 2012.
2  Includes the UN Office in Yemen, Joint AU-UN Chief Mediator for Darfur, and the Personal Representative for the Border Controversy between Guyana and Venezuela.
3  For more information on the Secretary-General’s review and related discussions at the UN, see Richard Gowan, “‘Less Bound to the Desk’: Ban Ki-moon, the UN, and Preventive Diplomacy,” in Global Governance 18, 2012, pages 398-399.
4  UN Document A/66/354/Add.1, DFS FBFD.
   Figures for the Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Special Adviser for Myanmar, Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan, Special Envoy for Resolution 1559, and the UN and Arab League Envoy for Syria represent proposed staff strength for 2012, and are subject to change. Staff strength not available for the UN Office in Yemen, Joint AU-UN Chief Mediator for Darfur, or the Personal Representative for the Border Controversy between Guyana and Venezuela.
5  For comparative purposes with the preceding graph, and as personnel information is not available for the UN Office in Yemen, Joint AU-UN Chief Mediator for Darfur, or the Personal Representative for the Border Controversy between Guyana and Venezuela, these missions are not counted within this graph.
6  United Nations Department of Public Information, Security Council 6731st meeting, SC/10570, 7 March 2012.
7  Represents a proposed figure for 2012, and is subject to change.
8  Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia (S/2012/643), 22 August 2012, para 79 and 27.