



# Media Note

New York

19 September 2023

## UN General Assembly Insights: Wednesday 20 September

World leaders are in New York for the UN General Assembly high-level week, during which they will participate in a host of summits and side events on global issues. Over the course of the week, Crisis Group will highlight forthcoming meetings with a focus on peace, security and current conflicts. We will release a note each evening commenting on the next day's events. *These notes are for attribution, and quotations from Crisis Group staff are available for use by the media.*

### 1. The Big Event: Zelenskyy at the Security Council

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is set to make his first in-person appearance at the Security Council today. UN observers will be watching to see whether Zelenskyy and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov go head to head in the Council chamber. That outcome is rather unlikely, however. Each of the two men is likely to stay outside the Council while the other speaks.

Listening to how other Council members frame their views on Russia's war in Ukraine, and the extent to which they signal support for Ukraine's counteroffensive, or alternatively call for diplomacy to stop the fighting, will be instructive. Statements from the P3 (France, the UK and the U.S.) and the Council's European members (Albania and Malta) will almost surely voice support for Kyiv. Statements from Brazil, the United Arab Emirates and the three African members (Ghana, Gabon and Mozambique) may offer a snapshot of the attitudes of countries from the so-called Global South to the war. During his Tuesday morning speech to the General Assembly, Brazil's president expressed that only dialogue can yield a lasting solution to the war.

Olga Oliker, Crisis Group's Project Director for Europe and Central Asia, says,

Although far from the only conflict roiling the world, Russia's war in Ukraine is simultaneously about Ukraine's defence of its sovereignty, the future of the European security order and the shape of global security for years to come. A lot is riding on this, for all of us.

### 2. In Focus: Stopping Sudan's War

The UN, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, the European Union and the African Union will co-host a [ministerial meeting](#) this morning on the humanitarian situation in Sudan and the Horn of Africa. The session aims to galvanise additional international assistance for the UN's humanitarian efforts in Sudan. Fighting across Sudan has displaced over five million people,

but the UN has only raised 26 per cent of the \$1.8 billion it needs. This event follows up on a June pledge event in Geneva.

The UN has struggled to carve out a meaningful political role since war broke out in Sudan in April, and the organisation is now largely relegated to coordinating humanitarian assistance. As Crisis Group reported in its [annual briefing, \*Ten Challenges for the UN\*](#), divisions among the Council's permanent members and caution among its African members left the Council too polarised to agree on action that could halt the fighting or to back other diplomatic efforts. The UN's political mission in the country, UNITAMS, is at an impasse, and the mission's head, Volker Perthes, announced his resignation last week following months of political pressure from the Sudanese army.

Crisis Group recommends that the Security Council take a more proactive approach to resolving the conflict. One opportunity to do so will come when the UNITAMS mandate comes up for renewal in early December. Though Council members are unlikely to change the mission's overall objectives, they can still use a new resolution to deliver a sharper message to the warring parties and offer more political backing for other diplomatic initiatives.

Alan Boswell, Crisis Group's Project Director for the Horn of Africa, says,

The Sudanese state is collapsing at lightning speed, and yet the world has scarcely seemed to notice. While there are no simple answers to a crisis of Sudan's magnitude, world leaders should start by prioritising a coherent response.

### **3. Also on the Agenda: The UN and Artificial Intelligence**

The Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology is set to host a ministerial roundtable on governing artificial intelligence (AI) and the work of the UN's new High-Level Advisory Body on AI. This expert is set to produce a report by the end of 2023 proposing options for global AI governance.

AI governance is a growing focus at the UN. In July, the Security Council held its first-ever session on the implications of AI for international peace and security. The Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace, a policy brief outlining a new vision for international cooperation on peace and security, makes the case for new multilateral frameworks to oversee AI regulation. The topic also featured prominently in his address to the General Assembly on Tuesday. Crisis Group's *Ten Challenges* briefing recommends that member states treat the UN as a platform for conversations about AI governance:

Moving the AI conversation to a multilateral venue where all states have a voice and vote could also gradually build support for greater levels of human control of AI weaponry as well as other military applications of AI. Human control of weapons is often articulated in legal terms, but it is also a sensible policy precaution to reduce the possibility of mistakes that could escalate conflict.

### **4. Crisis Group Will Also Watch...**

The Secretary-General will convene the Climate Ambition Summit with heads of state and government. The Netherlands and Germany will host the annual high-level meeting of the Feminist Foreign Policy+ Group. Iraq will host the ministerial follow-up meeting on the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership.