



# Watch List 2019

**First Update** | 17 April 2019

Watch List Updates complement International Crisis Group's annual Watch List, most recently published in January 2019. These early-warning publications identify major conflict situations in which prompt action, driven or supported by the European Union and its member states, would generate stronger prospects for peace. The Watch List Updates include situations identified in the annual Watch List and/or a new focus of concern.

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# Lowering Israeli-Palestinian Tensions

In the wake of Israel's legislative elections, which appeared to hand another victory to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his right-wing partners (coalition negotiations are ongoing), the mood in the occupied Palestinian territories is tense. In Gaza, as in 2014, Hamas and Israel appear close to a conflagration that neither party desires. After an escalation on 26 March, the UN and Egypt have worked to guide the parties back to the ceasefire concluded indirectly in November. On 30 March, the one-year anniversary of the Great March of Return, Israeli soldiers killed four Palestinians and wounded 300 others near the line separating Israel from Gaza. Since then, calm seems to have returned. Even if the truce holds, however, another forthcoming anniversary looms. On 15 May, Palestinians commemorate al-Nakba, the catastrophe that befell them with the establishment of the State of Israel, which could be a flashpoint of disruption.

So, too, could tensions elsewhere. At Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade (Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount), Israeli authorities and Palestinian worshippers are [struggling over control of a building](#) next to the Gate of Mercy. Shuttered by Israel in 2003, it was forcibly reopened in February by Palestinians who turned it into a prayer hall. Israel seeks to reverse the change, risking a major escalation with Jordan, which manages the area through the Islamic *waqf*. Along with the release of the Trump administration's peace plan, which was slated to happen sometime after the Israeli elections, these factors have converged to heighten the sense of volatility throughout the territories, with direct implications for EU programs and EU policy in support of a negotiated two-state outcome.

*To help lower tensions, the EU and its member states should:*

- ❑ Encourage Israel to move toward the second and third phases of the November ceasefire agreement.
- ❑ Discourage the Palestinian Authority from imposing sanctions on the Gaza Strip with the intent of undermining Hamas.
- ❑ Announce support for both legislative and presidential elections in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as a first step toward reunification of the Palestinian political establishment.
- ❑ Publicly call upon Israel and Jordan to reaffirm their commitment to the Status Quo – in place since Ottoman times and accepted by both states – regulating worshippers' access to the Holy Esplanade. Continue to affirm the *waqf's* right to use the building as it sees fit, while also affirming the historical and religious connections of both sides to the site.

## *Gaza*

On 25 March, a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip landed in Mishmeret, north of Tel Aviv, destroying a family house and wounding seven Israelis, including a twelve-year-old girl and two infants. Hamas said it had launched the 25 March rocket in error,

but few in Israel believed this claim. Many Israelis interpreted the rocket's firing as an attempt by Hamas to deflect growing domestic criticism of its rule.

The latest escalation was likely an attempt by Hamas to force Netanyahu to fulfil Israel's obligations under the November ceasefire. In that agreement, Hamas committed to end rocket fire into Israel and promised to restrain the intensity of the ongoing protests. Israel in turn said it would extend the nautical limit for Gaza fishermen and allow Qatar to pay Gaza government salaries and supply fuel to Gaza's power plant for a period of six months, to end in April. This was to be followed by secondary and tertiary phases once the risk of war had passed. The latter phases were to include measures to restore Gaza's electricity, increase the number of Palestinians allowed in and out of the strip, expand the entry of merchandise, further extend the range off the coast in which Gazans can fish, and generally ease the blockade.

While Israel has allowed the passage of Qatari fuel and funds, and Hamas has demonstrated its capacity to restrain protests undertaken as part of the Great March of Return, Israel has shown little willingness to take further steps beyond the initial ceasefire agreement. Since November, the talks have stalled without progress toward fulfilling Hamas's central demand – that Israel loosen the economic stranglehold on the strip. Recommitment to the indirect ceasefire agreement that followed the last escalation at the end of March succeeded in calming the situation in Gaza ahead of the Israeli elections. Yet unless there is progress in more expansive efforts to address Gaza's economic plight, it is likely that other escalations will ensue.

### *Jerusalem*

In Jerusalem, Israeli authorities and Palestinian worshippers continue to struggle over control of a building at Jerusalem's Holy Esplanade (Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount), next to the Gate of Mercy. In February, Palestinians forcibly regained access to the site, which Israel closed in 2003, turning it into a prayer hall. Israel seeks to close the building once more. It is important to rapidly resolve this crisis because minor incidents at the esplanade have previously triggered major escalations, especially at times of relative volatility in Gaza and the West Bank. Moreover, if the incoming Israeli government formulates its strategy while a crisis is festering at the site, it might decide to further erode the historical Status Quo at the site, which is necessary for stability because it is a framework for managing the site that all parties have stated they are committed to upholding.

Israel and Jordan have negotiated an agreement over the building: to close it for repairs and then reopen it for daily use. Israel also committed not to carry out an Israeli court order to forcibly close the site until the 9 April elections. The parties continue to negotiate, hoping to reach a mutually acceptable solution. But the parties' positions remain apart regarding the duration of the closure before repairs commence; Israeli archaeological supervision of *waqf*-executed works; and the building's ultimate function. Worse, the recently expanded Islamic *waqf*, which runs the esplanade under Jordanian auspices and became more representative of Palestinian Jerusalemite views following a reshuffle in February, has been effectively excluded from the negotiations. Its exclusion bodes ill for Palestinian Jerusalemite support of any agreement reached.

### *Policy Recommendations for the EU and its Member States*

The EU and members of the international community should take immediate steps to alleviate the economic strain on Gaza. European aid to the Gaza Strip must take the form of long-term support, for instance through infrastructure funds, as well as immediate measures that could meet short-term demands. Key for the latter is the need to address the shortage of medical supplies that are allowed into the Gaza Strip. Gaza's sagging health care sector is facing unprecedented pressure as a result of the widespread injuries caused by Israel's response to the return marches.

The EU's economic intervention in the Gaza Strip must be coupled with a political response aimed at long-term resolution to issues of access. Israel and Hamas drew up the blueprint for the required measures in the November ceasefire agreement, but have yet to put them into practice. The EU and its member states should encourage Israel to move toward the second and third phases of the agreement by loosening restrictions on freedom of movement of people in and out of Gaza, encouraging the greater passage of exports from the Gaza Strip to Israel and the West Bank, expanding access to the Mediterranean for Gaza fishermen, and advancing infrastructure for electricity supply to Gaza's power plant. Israel should take these steps assuming that Hamas holds up its end of the bargain: no rocket attacks into Israel, and a reduction in intensity of protests near the fence that marks the boundary between the Gaza Strip and Israel.

Alongside these measures, the EU and member states should try to persuade the Palestinian Authority (PA) to drop its policies of sanctioning the Gaza Strip with the intent of undermining Hamas. These policies have included steps to cut the salaries of civil servants and pensioners (most of those affected are not affiliated with Hamas, but the salaries of Fatah and other PA employees are critical to keeping the Gaza economy afloat). The EU could, for example, threaten to withdraw funding from various EU-funded initiatives in the West Bank if such measures by the PA are not reversed.

The EU should also publicly announce that it is encouraged by the PA's call for elections, and signal that it would expect such elections to be administered in the near future in Gaza and the West Bank, while calling on Israel to allow these elections to also take place in East Jerusalem. Hamas has indicated willingness to allow legislative elections in Gaza at the same time as in the West Bank as long as the PA agrees to stage a presidential election in both territories as well. The EU should encourage the PA to announce its willingness to also carry out presidential elections, as well as call on both parties to allow for free campaigning in their respective territories.

It would also be important for the EU to signal its willingness to revisit the principles of the Quartet, first applied in 2006, in a manner that incorporates lessons learned from 2006 and makes room for Hamas's engagement in the Palestinian political process (these principles do not apply to Hamas as a party but to the PA). Perhaps the most significant contribution that the EU could make toward opening up the possibility of stabilising Gaza and averting a new war would be to signal its willingness to fund any PA government that meets one of the Quartet principles – "acceptance of previous agreements and obligations", recognising that the other two conditions (recognition of Israel and commitment to non-violence) are subsumed within these past agreements – and that a PA government would be deemed to be in compliance with the Quartet principles if it committed to "respect past agreements".

In 2007, a PA unity government that included Hamas pledged to “respect” past agreements, and the Quartet deemed the promise insufficient. It is long past time for the EU and the Quartet to signal that a PA commitment to “respect past agreements” is sufficient to secure EU funding.

In terms of the [tense standoff in Jerusalem](#), Jordan should include the recently expanded Islamic *waqf* in its negotiations with Israel over the building. According to the Status Quo, the Islamic *waqf* is to decide on the building’s function. Following overdue repairs, Israel should remove all obstacles to the *waqf* in designating the building as it sees fit, including as a *waqf*-operated Islamic educational institute or as a prayer space. Doing so would lower the risk of future violence. The *waqf* has already rejected Western offers of technical and expert support, fearing that it would lead to the esplanade’s internationalisation, which Israel also opposes. The EU should therefore limit its role to publicly calling upon the parties to respect the Status Quo at the Holy Esplanade and to reaffirming the historical and religious connections of both sides to the site.

# Treating Mexico's Epidemic of Violence under the López Obrador Government

Rising violent crime rates remain the greatest threat to public security and stability in Mexico. Over the past twelve years, large criminal syndicates have fragmented into smaller groups, sparking a plethora of lethal, region-specific armed conflicts. President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, in office since December, has made the reduction of violence a centrepiece of his governing platform. But homicide rates in 2019 are on track to surpass the record levels of previous years, peaking in states such as Guanajuato and Jalisco. The tide of killings is partly due to the breakdown of cartels into approximately 200 smaller armed groups, which has generated competition among those groups and undercut the ability of crime bosses to enforce discipline. At the same time, the Mexican state, and its security services in particular, continue to suffer from corruption, collusion with illegal actors or even criminal capture of local police forces. In the absence of deep reforms to the country's security and justice institutions, Mexico is likely to continue suffering enormous violence. President López Obrador still enjoys the political capital and popularity to set a new course, but his administration has yet to lay out clear policies toward critical issues such as scaling back the role of the military in providing security and curbing human rights violations by the security forces.

*As the EU and its member states define their cooperation with the new government, they can help address Mexico's security crisis by:*

- ❑ Recommending that Mexico reframe its “war on drugs” as a set of internal armed conflicts, which would allow a shift to regionally tailored security policies, including peacebuilding tools such as young combatant demobilisation in the country's most embattled regions.
- ❑ Encouraging the Mexican federal government to return public security provision to civilian police forces following reinvigorated efforts to reform the security and justice system. These reforms should stress above all the implementation of effective oversight and accountability mechanisms led by independent civilian appointees with the power to impose disciplinary measures on state actors, most urgently police, armed forces, and prosecutorial services.
- ❑ Backing the creation of elite task forces, comprising thoroughly vetted and trained officers, within the federal police and prosecutorial bodies to give oversight and accountability mechanisms teeth by specialising in investigating corruption, collusion, and violence within security forces. These units should also help protect local reform efforts.
- ❑ Supporting security reform through technical assistance and sharing best practices with Mexican policymakers, including during the regular political dialogues on security and justice between the EU and Mexico. Specifically, the EU could offer assistance for local mediation and demobilisation efforts, women-led victims' collectives searching for disappeared persons, the National Search System for People, and promising police reform initiatives at the local level.

### *The Search for Security and Accountability*

Though Mexico's security crisis has mutated, government policies remain anchored in the narrative of a "war on drugs" against professionalised trafficking cartels that the state expects to win largely through military might. Offensives against specific criminal targets have succeeded on their own terms: more than 150 have been arrested or killed over the past twelve years and many larger criminal structures fractured as a result. But insecurity remains rampant. The government's failure to re-establish and strengthen local civilian institutions has allowed smaller criminal groups to continue operating and re-emerge in even more violent ways. In Michoacán, for example, at least a dozen armed groups broke from a larger organisation following a federal civil-military intervention launched in 2013. Similar patterns are evident elsewhere: with neither the state nor any single criminal actor dominant enough to impose order, smaller groups have become locked in conflict over patches of markets, territories, and populations.

The result is an expanding patchwork of region-specific armed conflicts. The toll on civilians is high, with ordinary citizens caught up in the crossfire, families of criminals targeted and internal displacement on the rise. Violence is exacerbated by cycles of personal revenge, for instance in the mountains of Guerrero, where blood feuds, involving killings and forced disappearances, can stretch on for decades. Criminal groups exploit entrenched networks of corruption to collude with state officials, with public institutions becoming participants in criminal conflicts. In some regions, these groups bribe security forces to act against their rivals and overlook their own crimes.

Reversing Mexico's growing violence requires that the state undertake reforms at federal and local levels. This would require negotiating gradual civilian scrutiny of the military's conduct and abuses. However, the López Obrador administration's dependence – at least in the immediate term – on the army and navy to provide public security hinders such efforts. The creation of a National Guard as the cornerstone of López Obrador's new security policy in March 2019 appears unlikely to help. Indeed, with that force's core personnel and high command stemming from the military, its design and creation suggest that López Obrador has opted for greater militarisation in the hope of quick results rather than to take on the uphill task of creating effective oversight of the conduct and performance of Mexico's security forces.

Exactly how the government will work to stop abusive conduct in the security forces and dismantle criminal structures within them is unclear. Despite López Obrador's promises, the government has produced no concrete proposals to monitor or prevent future human rights abuses perpetrated by the police or army. Ending enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, which have been documented by the UN High Commission on Human Rights and others, should be a priority. Exposing those most responsible for criminal misconduct in the security services requires finding ways of protecting lower-ranking officers forced into criminal activity by their commanders. As the government establishes the National Guard it should ensure adequate training for new officers and enforce internal rules through the establishment of independent civilian oversight with teeth, potentially in the shape of ombudspersons with disciplinary powers, acting in close coordination with prosecutorial task forces dedicated to investigating wrongdoing by the security forces.

Aside from these reforms, the Mexican government must look beyond centralised strategies and the use of force to resolve the country's internal conflicts. Earlier secu-



rity policies, such as the military offensive against organised crime initiated in 2006 and the creation of a new Federal Police in 2009, have emphasised grand, top-down solutions. But tackling localised violence requires a regionally tailored approach.

Given fiscal constraints on the Mexican state and flawed federal institutions, targeted support for promising local security and justice reforms and peacebuilding initiatives offers an alternative. Such local initiatives include, for example, recent efforts to reconstruct police forces in municipalities such as Xalapa in Veracruz, where police have worked closely with independent security experts but are unable to confront rising criminal violence on their own. The government should also strengthen initiatives, such as those led by community organisations, to mediate among feuding armed groups and clans to interrupt cycles of revenge killing. These efforts should also endeavour to reach local agreements on how to demobilise young combatants, who are the main victims and perpetrators of lethal violence and form the operational backbone of armed groups. Any move in this direction would have to establish when pledges of non-repetition and redress for victims by former combatants constitute sufficient grounds for offering support to get a job, resume normal civilian life and, where necessary, benefit from reduced sentences and state protection against criminal leaders.

At the federal level, one important step to protect and nurture such local reforms and initiatives would be the establishment of elite task forces within police and prosecutorial services. Such task forces, by providing focused support and coordinating tightly with each other and with local authorities, could help contain the inevitable violent opposition from criminal leaders who will resist any attempts to restrict their activities. In conjunction with independent civilian oversight within security forces, they could also spearhead efforts to tackle corruption, collusion and illegal violence within the police and the newly established National Guard, and pave the way for an eventual return of public security provision in Mexico into civilian hands.

The recent reactivation of Mexico's National Search System for People – over 40,000 have disappeared in Mexico according to the most recent official figures – with search commissions to be installed in each federated state, offers another opportunity. If equipped with sufficient funds as well as a robust mandate, these commissions could identify remains in clandestine graves and seek to clarify the circumstances leading to the disappearances. This would help shed light on local conflict patterns, foster victims' access to truth and justice, help restore communities torn apart by violence and rebuild trust between state and society. Such measures are particularly important given the López Obrador administration's estrangement from civil society after its February announcement that the state was ending all funding for civil society organisations. In particular, support for women-led victims' collectives searching for disappeared people through the National Search System would mark a clear commitment to collaboration with civic initiatives for an urgent but previously neglected cause. It would also boost proceedings in criminal investigations by incorporating the knowledge acquired by women's collectives over years of searching for loved ones despite a lack of state support.

### *How the EU Can Support Mexico's Reforms*

In its political dialogue with Mexico, the EU should express support for López Obrador's turn toward comprehensive security policies, including policies oriented toward peacebuilding, and recommend that his initial efforts be extended in order to tackle the reality of multiple internal armed conflicts. It should recommend concentrating resources on a limited number of pilot projects aiming to test specific regional policies toward insecurity, including municipal police reforms as well as mediation and demobilisation initiatives involving local communities and civil society organisations.

EU support should reinforce both local initiatives and critical federal level reforms. The reactivated National Search System for People merits particular attention and support, given its potential role in establishing the truth as to the violence that has ravaged various regions, restoring trust in the state and offering a model for future collaboration with civil society. Supporting women's collectives searching for the disappeared, for instance through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), represents a potent practical and symbolic measure aimed at backing the government's efforts to address past injustices. This would also highlight the essential role of civil society in reducing violence in Mexico at a time when its relations with the new government are under strain. At the federal level, the EU should provide technical support and political backing for creating the elite task forces within federal police and prosecutorial bodies. At the same time, it should emphasise the importance of civilian oversight of the armed forces, calling for civilian jurisdiction in the case of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings involving the military and greater overall transparency through the creation of civilian ombudsmen offices.

# North Korea: Getting Back to the Table

The tensions between Washington and Pyongyang that flared dangerously in 2017 have significantly abated, but for the moment so have hopes for a breakthrough that would end decades of conflict. North Korea and the U.S. pivoted from escalation to dialogue in 2018, resulting in the first leader-level summit between the two states and agreement on a broad set of shared principles. The summit might have paved the way for a diplomatic process to negotiate steps to denuclearise the North (Washington's ultimate goal) in return for phased sanctions relief and other steps toward ending North Korea's political and economic isolation (Pyongyang's chief aim). But no such process has yet emerged, and a failed second summit in Hanoi in February 2019 has left each side waiting for the other to make the next move. While tensions remain manageable, the diplomatic stalemate has costs and risks, and it will be important for the parties to find their way back to the table.

A return to escalation on the Korean peninsula would have global security implications, and the EU therefore has a stake in supporting the peace process, as well as a humanitarian interest in easing the plight of the North Korean people.

*Recommendations for EU action include:*

- ❑ Supporting the U.N. Security Council's goal of North Korean denuclearisation by implementing the sanctions regime it has created, while also underscoring to Washington that a maximalist approach to negotiations – in which the U.S. demands full denuclearisation prior to any sanctions relief – is doomed to fail.
- ❑ Voicing its support for China's and South Korea's preferred "measure-for-measure" approach to negotiations – in which concessions by one side are rewarded with concessions from the other.
- ❑ Making clear the willingness of the EU and member states to lend technical and financial support to implement any agreement that may be reached between the U.S. and North Korea.
- ❑ Expanding support for humanitarian and development projects in North Korea, where the sanctions regime permits.
- ❑ Ensuring that human rights concerns about the North Korean government's treatment of its people continue to be raised in international forums, recognising that neither Washington nor Seoul is likely to do so in their direct negotiations with Pyongyang.

## *High-level Diplomacy: Progress, Pitfalls and Possibilities*

A period of dangerously high tensions between Washington and Pyongyang in 2017 gave way to welcome dialogue in 2018. The first important advance centred on South Korea's successful hosting of the Winter Olympics in February. The U.S. and North Korea agreed informally to an "Olympic Truce", with each side freezing activities that the other found most provocative – missile and nuclear testing in the case of the North, and most joint U.S.-South Korean military exercises in the case of the U.S.

The mutual freeze remained in place after the Olympics were over, and the thaw in relations expanded. In June 2018, President Trump and Chairman Kim met at the

first leader-level summit between the U.S. and North Korea. It produced no dramatic breakthrough, but generated a joint statement that set out the broad mutual goals of the two sides, and potentially opened the way for more diplomacy to further ease tensions. The year also saw three inter-Korean summits (in April, May, and September), and a series of modest confidence-building steps from North Korea, including the demolition of its only nuclear test site and returning the remains of 55 service personnel lost in the Korean War of 1950-53 to the U.S.

But efforts to move beyond the progress made in 2018 in the first quarter of 2019 were not a success. The collapse of the second U.S.-North Korea summit in Hanoi on 27-28 February this year without any outcome document or other sign of agreement highlighted the disconnect that still exists between Washington and Pyongyang. In spite of prior warnings that its terms would be unacceptable, North Korea proposed a deal that asked Washington to go well past its comfort zone on sanctions relief in return for measured steps on denuclearisation. For its part, the U.S. seemed to row back from the pragmatic stance signalled by the U.S. special representative for North Korea prior to the summit, pushing North Korea beyond plausible limits on denuclearisation in return for comprehensive sanctions relief only after denuclearisation is complete.

For the time being, the year-old mutual freeze that emerged in early 2018 appears to be keeping tensions at manageable levels. Trump and Kim also seem to have a degree of personal goodwill, and the heated rhetoric of 2017 has not returned. But the diplomatic impasse has costs and risks. The unwritten freeze-for-freeze is vulnerable to misinterpretation or being disregarded if either side decides it would serve its interests to ratchet up pressure on the other to make concessions; either could put the parties back into an escalatory cycle.

Meanwhile, the impressive progress in relations between North and South that had developed over the course of three inter-Korean summits in 2018 is starting to erode. North Korea has shown less willingness to participate in the process of retrieving remains from within the demilitarised zone, and recently withdrew – albeit only temporarily – from an inter-Korean liaison office at Kaesong. In addition, a weakening South Korean economy could diminish President Moon Jae-in's domestic political standing and ability to play the peacemaker between Pyongyang and Washington. Finally, the longer the impasse persists, the more the people of North Korea will suffer the effects of sanctions.

That said, both the U.S. and North Korea still have incentives to make progress in negotiations.

On the U.S. side, Trump has counted the stabilisation of the Korean crisis as a major foreign policy triumph. While he is hemmed in to some extent by hawkish advisors and a watchful Congress that is deeply sceptical of his ability to reach a deal that protects U.S. interests, he has made clear that he wants to avoid reverting to heightened tensions and likely still harbours grandiose ambitions of a full-fledged deal. Although he may become leier about risking another Hanoi as 2020 elections draw near, for the present he is seemingly open to a third summit. At a minimum concrete steps that allow him to highlight his claim that he has defused the Korean situation could be attractive.

As for Kim, though he is striving not to show it, economic difficulties at home are growing, increasing the appeal of sanctions relief. A weak harvest in 2018 and the reported closure of several industrial enterprises in the first quarter of 2019 indicate that the country is chafing beneath sanctions put in place in 2016 and 2017 – essentially because China, North Korea's biggest trading partner, continues in large part to implement them. In December, the UN sanctions regime imposes a deadline for all member states to expel North Korean migrant labourers who remain on their territory, which – if implemented by China and Russia (where the vast majority reside) – will dry up an important remaining source of foreign currency revenue for the North Korean economy. Like Trump, the Kim regime has stated a willingness to participate in a third summit, though Pyongyang also signalled that it could lose patience with efforts at dialogue if the U.S. makes further demands it considers unrealistic and talks show no progress by the end of 2019.

### *The Way Forward*

While each side now appears to be eyeing the other and waiting for it to make the first move back toward the negotiating table, if and when they get there, it will be important to come with realistic goals. As Crisis Group has previously suggested, seeking a modest deal to build confidence and generate momentum would be a good next step.

The contours of such a deal might be as follows: North Korea could offer the fully verified closure of all or part of its Yongbyon nuclear facility – the only known facility in the country that produces plutonium, although not the only facility that produces fissile material. The U.S. could support sanctions relief sufficient to allow the reopening of the Kaesong Industrial Complex, a light manufacturing zone on the inter-Korean border, the resumption of inter-Korean tourism at North Korea's Mt. Kumgang and in the city of Kaesong, as well as some South Korean investment in North Korean transport infrastructure. To sweeten the deal, the U.S. could agree to a declaration formally ending the Korean War, and the two sides could embark on discussions about opening diplomatic liaison offices in each other's capitals.

The viability of such a deal rests on the proportionality of mutual concessions. While Yongbyon is an important facility, it does not represent the entirety of North Korea's fissile material production, and is therefore not overwhelmingly valuable. Similarly, while restarting Kaesong would generate useful revenues for Pyongyang, and the limited rolling back of some UN sanctions would have some symbolic weight, it would not involve anywhere near the level of sanctions relief that Kim has been seeking.

The approach would also signal acceptance by Washington of an essential fact, which is that a measure-for-measure approach to negotiations with North Korea is the only way to diminish its nuclear capacity. Although eliminating all of North Korea's weapons of mass destruction is a laudable long-term goal, and consistent with directives from the UN Security Council, it is hard to imagine Pyongyang acquiescing in the foreseeable future to complete renunciation of the nuclear program that it regards as the ultimate guarantor of the regime's security against a range of existential threats.

### *A Role for the EU*

Although the EU is less centre stage than the Six-Party Talks countries (South Korea, U.S., Japan, North Korea, China, and Russia), it can act pragmatically behind the scenes to generate momentum for U.S.-North Korea dialogue, and to offer support to the people of North Korea, who are whipsawed between international sanctions and the repressive policies of the Kim regime. Helpfully, Pyongyang regards the EU as a relatively benign actor on the Korean peninsula and, although it did not respond positively to some recent actions taken by EU member states that it saw as meddling in Korean affairs (the UK decision to launch BBC World Service programming in Korean in 2017, for example), the perceived overall impact of the EU in peninsula politics remains positive.

First, the EU and member states could encourage the parties to re-engage in dialogue and to approach the process with realistic goals. While continuing to implement sanctions in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, they can also make clear to the U.S. that maximalist approaches toward diplomacy with Pyongyang – in which the U.S. seeks to achieve full denuclearisation prior to any sanctions relief – cannot succeed. Consistent with this position, they can also voice support for a measure-for-measure approach to negotiations favoured by Seoul and Beijing, and argue to Washington that such an approach is the only way to gain near-term concessions on fissile material production and the corresponding proliferation risk – an issue of global concern, including to the EU.

Second, at a more practical level, the EU and member states could lend technical expertise and capacity, as well as financial assistance in support of whatever deal might emerge. The UK and France – which as nuclear weapons states have extensive technical capabilities – have already discussed the former possibility with Washington and Seoul, respectively.

Finally, the EU and its member states are well-positioned to keep the people of North Korea front and centre in their thinking about the ongoing situation on the North Korean peninsula. Where permitted under the sanctions regime (which includes a broad exemption for humanitarian assistance), they can help counter the growing trend toward food insecurity in the North through humanitarian aid. Another worthwhile investment – but one that in many cases would require a loosening in the sanctions regime – would be in projects that make North Korean communities more resilient to natural disasters and other unexpected shocks (some European projects of this nature closed down following the spike in missile and nuclear weapons testing by Pyongyang in 2017).

Given their traditional leadership in this area, the EU and member states could also work to keep international attention focused on human rights abuses in North Korea – detailed in a report mandated by the UN Human Rights Council in 2014 – which are not issues that Washington or Seoul are likely to raise as they focus on the core topics at stake in the peace process. This can mean working to advance discussion and, when appropriate, putting forward resolutions in UN bodies like the Human Rights Council that could help Kim understand that, ultimately, improving North Korea's performance on human rights is the price of its full acceptance by European states and others.

# Supporting Young Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Of the 3.6 million Syrian refugees Turkey is generously hosting, some 65 per cent are aged 24 or younger. Within this population, the 15-24 age group is particularly vulnerable to abuse, as well as to exploitation by criminals and militant groups.

As outlined in [Crisis Group's February 2019 report](#), young Syrian refugees are at risk for several reasons. They face high rates of poverty and unemployment, many drop out of school, and vast numbers suffer from untreated wartime trauma as well as neglect where they live today. In provinces such as Şanlıurfa, along Turkey's border with Syria, criminals, smugglers and Islamist militants seek to enlist Syrian youth in illicit activities. Young Syrian women and girls are at risk of being coerced into exploitative marriages and survival sex. These threats not only imperil young Syrians, but they may also endanger Turkish citizens and exacerbate intra-communal tensions.

In March 2016, the EU and Turkey concluded a deal to curb the flow of refugees into Europe. The €6 billion in support the EU has pledged in this framework, known as the EU-Turkey Refugee Facility, has helped Ankara meet humanitarian needs and build its institutional capacity to foster refugee integration. But integrating Syrians will become more difficult as Turkey's economic plight worsens. Jobs for Syrian youth, already scarce, could grow scarcer, pushing more young people into illicit activity or enhancing the appeal of clandestine migration to Europe.

Turkey and the EU must continue to cooperate if they are to respond effectively. While the EU has already contracted the €3 billion first tranche of the Refugee Facility, €1.8 billion in the second tranche has yet to be committed. The EU should ensure that the programming supported by these remaining funds and any future EU member state funding helps address the needs of youth aged 15-24 and offers productive employment opportunities for both Syrians and Turkish citizens.

*In particular, the EU and its member states, as well as non-EU international donors can support the Turkish government by:*

- ❑ Sustaining funding and technical assistance to Turkey to meet the needs of Syrian refugees, with emphasis on mitigating risks to Syrians aged 15-24 and to women of all ages, especially those who are widowed or for other reasons “unaccompanied”.
- ❑ Continuing to support Turkey's strained educational system so that the state builds more schools and schools hire more teachers. Integrating more Syrian teachers and counsellors (including women) into the public school system can help Syrian youth stay in school after age twelve, when many drop out. Increasing stipends to families with children in school can also help improve enrolment rates – particularly for girls – beyond primary school.
- ❑ Aiding the development of Turkish public institutions, so that they are better able to provide effective psychosocial support to refugees:
  - To help meet the needs of traumatised Syrian youth and women in abusive circumstances, the EU and member states should allocate more funding and technical assistance for local psychosocial support and protection services provided by the Ministry of Education's Counselling Research Centres and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Policies' Social Services Centres.

- Support for improved counselling in public schools or temporary education centres can help reach enrolled youth.
- Support for NGO-run community centres that offer psychosocial programs – either in the form of counselling or community engagement activities – can help reach refugees who are not in school and who are reluctant to seek help from official bodies for a variety of reasons (including past trauma).
- Supporting programs to raise refugees’ awareness of their rights and recourse in the face of various risks. In particular, the EU can help Turkey design programming that alerts Syrian youth to the dangers of criminal predation and educates Syrian women and girls about the precarious legal status of wives and mothers in marriages not sanctioned by the state. Further programming is needed to better reach women who are already facing such exploitation, as they are often socially isolated.
- Stimulating job creation through programs that strengthen Turkey’s apprenticeship system, offer training and micro-credit for setting up agricultural businesses, and support small-scale business cooperatives.
- Emphasising, through regular counter-terrorism dialogues and in other forums, the need for effective anti-bribery measures to curb illegal crossings by criminals and jihadists who exploit Syrian youth and threaten Turkish citizens – and making available more technical assistance and expertise.
- Continuing to appeal to Turkey to allow principled humanitarian operations in neighbouring Turkish-controlled parts of Aleppo, which would allow European donors to expand their humanitarian support to the area and could help accommodate a new displacement should violence escalate in Idlib.

### *Vulnerabilities of Syrian Refugee Youth*

Syrian refugees in Turkey – particularly young people and women and girls of all ages – are made especially vulnerable by their poverty and by the trauma they have faced.

Around 50 per cent of Syrian refugees in Turkey live below the poverty line. It is very difficult for Syrian refugees to find work, and when they do, employers often exploit their economic vulnerability. In an economy in which nearly 35 per cent of Turkish citizens work informally, earning low wages in precarious conditions, Syrians who often lack local networks and language skills face even greater struggles to find employment. Roughly 65 per cent of Syrian households now rely on unregistered jobs, mostly in textile, furniture and shoemaking workshops, on construction sites, and in seasonal agriculture.

As for trauma, the sources are many. Many Syrian youth suffered greatly before they fled their home country. They lost family members and friends and saw their homes and livelihoods destroyed.

Together, trauma and poverty push young people out of school, where they could gain skills and be less exposed to the illicit networks that might otherwise seek to exploit them. While primary school enrolment is high, teenagers often drop out to marry, seek work or both. Exploitative marriages, including extralegal unions with



already married men, too often seem to poor, devastated families like a way to achieve economic security for their daughters, but leave women and girls exposed to abuse and with truncated legal rights vis-à-vis their husbands.

Trauma and poverty also make young people targets for criminal groups running smuggling, drug and prostitution rackets, as well as for organisations that promote armed struggle and sometimes sectarian hatred. Civilian extensions or affiliates of jihadist groups fighting in Syria (mostly those linked to Hei'at Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, the erstwhile al-Qaeda branch in the north-western Idlib region), may try to recruit or indoctrinate youth under the guise of religious and cultural education. If measures are not put in place, in the long run this could present a danger to the security and cohesion of the communities in which Syrians live.

### *Adapting Europe's Response*

European support can help Turkey deploy more effective programs to keep Syrian youth in school, address their psychological needs, strengthen protection services, better inform them of their rights, and help them earn higher, more reliable incomes. Such programs can help refugee youth in Turkey grow up safe and learn skills that they can use either in Turkey or, for those who someday return, in Syria. Policies that address youth refugee needs now can also strengthen Turkey's institutional capacity in the long term.

The recommendations above can help the EU and its member states take into account the needs of Syrian youth as they continue to program the second tranche of the EU-Turkey Refugee Facility and can also help member states meet these needs through further bilateral support in areas that the Facility does not cover. The EU and member states should also prepare for a possible new influx of refugees if the Syrian regime attacks the Idlib area in Syria's north west. Currently, a bilateral deal agreed by Turkey and Russia in September 2018 has forestalled attack. Although key provisions of the deal have not been fulfilled, Turkey and Russia's investment in their burgeoning bilateral relationship discourages Russian support for an attack on Idlib. Should these conditions change, however, open conflict in Idlib remains a possibility, and could push large numbers of refugees toward Turkey's Syrian border or into Turkish-controlled areas in northern Aleppo.

At the same time, the EU and its member states must think beyond the €6 billion now promised through the Refugee Facility. They need long-term plans to facilitate continued cooperation to help Turkey ensure that Syrian refugee youth and the Turkish citizens among whom they live are secure. The EU's assistance can be more effective if it were to frame its recommendations to Ankara concerning Syrian refugees' integration in the broader context of how to shore up Turkey's long-term stability and security. In discussions of refugee integration with Turkish authorities, the EU and its member states should emphasise the shared interest in tamping down crime, social tensions and other risks to both Syrians and Turkish citizens. Turkish officials are well aware of these challenges. Ankara will be more receptive to EU prescriptions that are framed accordingly.