

## Security Council (SC) Committee Overview

### National Model United Nations

#### *Introduction*

Following the two devastating world wars and the failings of the League of Nations, the United Nations (UN) was established on October 24, 1945 as an intergovernmental organization with the primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security, promote social and economic development, and advance human rights. Article 7 of the UN Charter established the Security Council as one of the UN's six principal organs, with the primary responsibility of preserving international peace and security.<sup>1</sup>

The Security Council held its first session on January 17th, 1946 at Church House, Westminster, London. Since its first meeting, the Security Council has relocated to its permanent residence at the UN headquarters in New York City.<sup>2</sup> At this time, the Security Council consisted of five permanent members - the Republic of China, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States - and six non-permanent members elected by the UN General Assembly for two-year terms. In 1965, an amendment was made to the UN Charter to increase the number of non-permanent members to ten. Regarding the permanent members, the People's Republic of China replaced the Republic of China in 1971, and the Russian Federation replaced the Soviet Union in 1991. As the body's structure has since remained largely unchanged since its founding in 1946, debate has stirred among many members over the Security Council's efficacy and authority as a mediator on matters of international security. Matters such as the Syrian Civil War, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear weapons programs have posed particular challenges to the Security Council.<sup>3</sup>

Traditionally, the Security Council discusses matters related to peacekeeping missions, political processes, the protection of human rights, disarmament, and humanitarian crises. However, the adoption of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* by the UN General Assembly in 2015 has increased the Security Council's focus on the intersection between sustainability, peace, and security. This shift can be seen in the Security Council's recent addressing of human rights and the protection of civilians for conflict prevention and sustainable development; Women, Peace, and Security; and the prevention of conflict and sustaining peace.

#### *Governance, Structure, and Membership*

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<sup>1</sup> Charter of the United Nations, 1945

<sup>2</sup> UN Security Council, What is the Security Council?, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, United Nations Security Council, 2014

The Security Council is the only UN body that has the power to adopt legally binding resolutions on Member States, which obligate Member States to carry out the Council's decisions under Article 25 of the UN Charter. However, the Security Council also has a variety of tools available to address issues on its agenda. For example, the President of the Security Council may issue presidential statements to communicate the Council's position on an issue. These statements are not legally-binding but are used to bring attention to important issues on the Security Council's agenda and recommend solutions to ongoing conflicts and disputes.

The Security Council has five permanent members, also known as the "P5," which include China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and the United States of America. The General Assembly also elects ten non-permanent members of the Security Council for a two-year term, which consist of five African and Asian states, one Eastern European state, two Latin American states, and two Western European and other states. Security Council elections are held in June, six months before the term starts, to allow for adequate time for Member States to prepare for the role. These elections are often competitive, with states expressing interest and campaigning for years in advance. The current non-permanent members of the Security Council for the 2020-2021 term are Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, Germany, Indonesia, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, and Vietnam. States elected to serve on the Security Council are expected to represent the interests of their region. Rule 13 of the Provisional Rules of Procedure allows for each member to be represented by an "accredited representative," such as a Head of Government, at all Security Council meetings.

Every Member State in the Security Council has one vote. Votes on all matters require a supermajority of nine Member States, but if one of the five permanent members of the Security Council votes "no" on a draft resolution, it does not pass. This ability is known as "veto power." Historically, Security Council members frequently used their veto power, sometimes hindering the ability of the Security Council to address contentious issues. However, in the last decades, the use of the veto has been comparatively rare. Any member may abstain from the vote, in which their vote is neither included as a "yes" or a "no," without impairing the validity of the decision. Any non-permanent or permanent member of the Security Council must abstain from voting in any decision concerning the peaceful settlement of a dispute to which it is a party.<sup>4</sup>

Although in recent years, the Security Council has adopted many resolutions by consensus and has been divided on few issues, the issue of reform was raised in a debate on November 20, 2018. In this debate, members of the UN General Assembly suggested that the Security Council must adapt, reform, and expand its membership to include underrepresented regions to increase transparency and meet emerging challenges to international peace and security. Delegates have

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<sup>4</sup> UN General Assembly, Rules of procedure, 2017

called for the expansion of the Security Council's permanent members and abolishing the use of veto power.<sup>5</sup>

The presidency of the Security Council is held by each member for one month, rotating according to alphabetical order. Security Council meetings can be held at any time when the President convenes or a Member State requests a meeting. Rule 3 of the Provisional Rules of Procedure of the Security Council allows the President to call a meeting if a situation requires the Council's attention. Thus, the Security Council meets regularly throughout the year. Meetings are normally held at the UN Headquarters in New York, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, meetings are temporarily held remotely through video conferences.<sup>6</sup> The Security Council also works with many entities such as the Organization for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (OPCW) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and oversees many sanctions and ad hoc committees within the UN. The Security Council also partners with organizations like the European Union and the African Union to address issues such as terrorism, disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, and the violent threat posed by non-state actors.

### ***Mandate, Functions, and Powers***

The mandate of the Security Council is to maintain international peace and security and to take action whenever peace and security are threatened. The Council is, therefore, responsible for determining the existence of a threat to peace or act of aggression and employing actions to resolve the situation. Chapters VI and VII of the UN Charter outline the actions that the Security Council can take to settle disputes. Under Chapter VI, the Security Council can settle disputes through peaceful means, such as negotiations and judicial settlements. Chapter VII focuses on other actions that the Security Council can take when there is a threat to peace or act of aggression, such as implementing provisional measures to de-escalate the situation or calling on other regional agencies to enforce operations and intervene if necessary.

Article 41 in the Charter also allows the Security Council to call on Member States to use economic sanctions and other measures that do not involve the use of force to resolve the situation. These measures include arms embargoes, enforcements for disarmament, or the activation of international criminal mechanisms. Diplomatically, the Council is also mandated to investigate disputes that may lead to international friction. The Security Council may also take military action against a state or entity that is threatening international security or deploy UN peacekeeping operations to be led by the Department of Peace Operations. The Security Council also cooperates with many international, regional, and non-governmental organizations to carry out its decisions and resolve conflicts.

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<sup>5</sup> Security Council Report, In Hindsight: The Veto, 2013; Security Council Report, The Permanent Members and the Use of the Veto: An Abridged History, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Lynch, U.N. Agencies Struggle to Carry on Remotely, 2020.

## ***Recent Sessions and Current Priorities***

In 2019, the Security Council held 285 meetings, issued 15 presidential statements, and adopted 26 resolutions. Recent resolutions in 2019 and 2020 have particularly focused state and region-specific issues in the Middle East and Africa, such as addressing the situation in Mali and Iraq.

Mali has been struggling with the safety of its citizens, ineffective governance, and economic and political instability, which have been exacerbated by governmental corruption. On June 28, 2019, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2480 which urges the accelerated implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali within a binding timeline.<sup>7</sup> Resolution 2531, adopted by the Security Council on June 29, 2020, reaffirmed this urge, addressing that several priority measures have not been fully implemented since the former resolution was passed.<sup>8</sup>

Iraq currently faces distinct challenges in continuing its stabilization efforts, its ongoing fight against terrorism, implementing recovery, reconstruction, and reconciliation, and meeting the needs of all Iraqis. On May 29, 2020, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2522 which prioritizes support and assistance in advancing inclusive political dialogue and promoting free and fair elections in Iraq.<sup>9</sup> In this resolution, the Security Council also addresses the crosscutting issue of gender mainstreaming by promoting and facilitating coordination with the Government of Iraq to ensure the full, equal, and meaningful participation, involvement, and representation of women at all levels.

In addition to state and regional issues, the Security Council has recently focused on crosscutting and thematic issues, such as threats to international peace and security, the financing of terrorism, and climate change. On July 19, 2019, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2482, which addressed threats to international peace and security by terrorism and organized crime.<sup>10</sup> In this resolution, the Council called upon Member States to put forth a global response to terrorism and organized crime, dismantle organized crime networks involved in trafficking, and ensure that domestic laws on sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict are in line with Member States' obligations under international law.

## ***Conclusion***

Overall, the Security Council is a main body of the UN tasked with the purpose of maintaining international peace and security. The Security Council's structure, powers, and mandate make the body unique and impactful in setting norms and governing state actions, as the Council is the only body that can put forth legally-binding decisions in which all Member States are required to

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<sup>7</sup> UN Security Council, The Situation in Mali (S/RES/2480 (2019)), 2019.

<sup>8</sup> UN Security Council, The Situation in Mali (S/RES/2531) 2020.

<sup>9</sup> UN Security Council, The Situation concerning Iraq (S/RES/2522), 2020

<sup>10</sup> UN Security Council, Threats to International Peace and Security (S/RES/2482 (2019)), 2019.

comply with. However, although the Security Council's primary responsibility is ensuring international peace and security, it currently also addresses crosscutting and thematic issues, such as the link between the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and international peace and security. The Council also continues to address state and region-specific situations as well as issues of climate change, terrorism, and gender.