



THE CONTEMPORARY SECURITY COUNCIL

PRE-CONFERENCE UPDATE

For each topic area, Representatives should consider the following questions. These questions should assist Representatives in gaining a better understanding of the issues at hand, particularly from your country's perspective:

- How did this conflict begin? Is this a new conflict or a reignition of a previous conflict?
- How have similar situations and conflicts been solved peacefully?
- What State and regional actors are involved in this conflict?
- If there are non-State actors involved in a conflict, are there any States supporting them? If so, which ones?

THE SITUATION IN SUDAN AND SOUTH SUDAN

Since the end of April 2014 unrest has increased in Sudan. Opposition leaders have been critical of the government's handling of the Darfur region. In response, the government arrested Ibrahim al-Sheikh and Sadiq al-Mahdi, two of the top opposition leaders, claiming they were "spreading harmful lies" and "insulting the state security forces by accusing them of being complicit" with the unrest in Darfur. The arrests, occurring in May and June, led to civilian protests in the country, creating concern about the proposed talks between the government and opposition leaders. The talks were to ease tensions ahead of parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for 2015.

The government has reinstated the Janjaweed, making the former militias a uniformed force in the country to fight the increasing unrest. United Nations officials stated the new force has been behind multiple atrocities like razing villages and burning down displacement camps. The government has denied these accusations, saying that the Janjaweed are patriots who are helping the government restore order to the country.

In South Sudan a ceasefire was signed on 9 May 2014, but was invalidated in less than a week by fighting in the Blue Nile region. The government accused the rebel forces of attacking them while rebels asserted the fighting was initiated by the government. The rebels maintain that the government re-established fighting in an attempt to create an interim government that did not include rebel forces.

Minor skirmishes and ceasefire violations continued throughout the summer, with the biggest attack happening in Nasir in July. Rebel forces took credit for the attack, claiming that they were freeing the city from the hands of the government. The government denied this, saying that the rebels continued to shell the city, but that they were not in complete control. With the continued fighting, the United Nations Security Council called on both sides to institute a ceasefire and form a transitional government immediately or face targeted sanctions.

On 25 August an agreement was signed in Ethiopia committing both sides to work toward a national unity government and a ceasefire in the country. The event was overshadowed when a United Nations cargo helicopter crashed on 26 August, killing three of its four Russian crewmembers. Rebel forces took credit for shooting down the helicopter, saying that the United Nations Mission in South Sudan was transporting government troops to the region. A preliminary probe determined that the helicopter was shot down, but that proof was not conclusive enough to assign blame to any group.

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THE SITUATION IN UKRAINE

Armed conflict has grown more hostile throughout the summer of 2014, but has been largely confined to the eastern regions. Many nations have accused Russia of sustained military involvement in the region, but Moscow has denied involvement.

On 25 May 2014 Petro Poroshenko was elected Ukrainian President, though most polling stations inside the conflict zone remained closed. President Poroshenko was greeted warmly by Western nations, with Russian President Vladimir Putin indicating he would accept the election results. Fighting continued after the elections with neither side able to gain the upper hand. In late June, President Poroshenko proposed a ceasefire that was initially accepted by the rebels but fell apart within days.

The downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 on 17 July brought increased international attention to Ukraine. Western nations claim the plane was shot down by a Russian-supplied missile launched from rebel occupied territory. The missile was similar to one used days earlier to down a Ukrainian military transport. In response to this perceived Russian involvement, the United States and the European Union brought new sanctions against Russia at the end of July. Russia reiterated that it has had no role in the Ukrainian conflict, and countered the new sanctions by creating an embargo on agricultural products from those countries and Ukraine.

In August dozens of Russian lorries were caught entering Ukraine without permission of the Ukrainian government. The Russian government claimed that they were delivering humanitarian supplies. Days later, however, Russian paratroopers were captured along with rebel forces. President Putin's government claimed the soldiers crossed the border "by accident." Rebel leader Alexander Zakharchenko claimed that there were 3,000 to 4,000 Russians fighting for the rebels, including active members of the Russian military, but that the soldiers were on leave.



Negotiations toward a lasting peace proved fruitful on 5 September, as both sides agreed to a ceasefire. A short while later, the Ukrainian parliament granted greater autonomy to the separatist regions in the east of the country and also announced amnesty for most involved in the fighting. On 16 September the crisis came full circle as the deal to join the European Union, which first set off fighting months earlier, was ratified with unanimous support from the Ukrainian parliament. Clashes continue in spite of an amended ceasefire signed by both sides in mid-September. However, both sides agree that the ceasefire is still intact.

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THE SITUATION IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Progress has been slow in the Central African Republic with regional mediators working to quell the violence between Muslim and Christian factions in the country. On 16 July the two sides signed a ceasefire in the Republic of the Congo in the hopes of containing the violence until the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) forces arrived. However, deadly attacks by Muslim rebels in mid-August killed 34 people; witnesses claimed that the rebels threatened to attack other villages.

Initial MINUSCA forces arrived in September, but the full complement of 12,000 MINUSCA forces is not expected to be in place until 2015. Steve Cockburn, Amnesty International Deputy Director for west and central Africa, stated “The gap between the number of peacekeepers promised and the number deployed must be urgently filled. Only once the full force is on the ground...can the [United Nations] properly fulfill its protection mandate.” Amnesty International also reported that serious human rights violations are happening in the country, including unlawful killings by African Union troops.

Violence has continued between the Muslim Séléka rebels and Christian militias, with French peacekeeping troops killing at least five gunmen after being attacked in September. The continuous violence has led the United Nations to be concerned for the February 2015 elections. Abdoulaye Bathily, head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, said that pushing the elections back could “risk the worsening of the crisis.” Concerns have also been raised about the effectiveness of MINUSCA, given that the mandate given by the Security Council includes 22 priority tasks to fulfill. Alison Giffen, head of the Civilians in Conflict Project at the Stimson Center, thinks that, “We are

currently asking peacekeeping operations to do far too much at the same time.”

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THE SITUATION IN SYRIA

After President Assad won the 3 June elections, United States Secretary of State John Kerry called on Iran, Russia and Hezbollah to help end the three-year-old civil war in Syria. There was hope that all parties would be able to reach a resolution, however, the elections gave the Assad government more leverage to continue the brutal crackdown on rebel elements in the country. President Assad has continued the blockade of United Nations supplies to beleaguered areas, where the civil war has displaced millions.

The civil war has radiated outwards from Damascus, with fighting happening around the Golan Heights. In late August Islamist opposition forces took control of the Quneitra Crossing on the demarcation line. Israeli soldiers were injured and returned fire against two Syrian Army positions in the Golan Heights. While many countries are concerned about Israel getting involved with the Syrian fighting, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that, “Israel should not interfere in the conflict and should respond only if attacked or to provide humanitarian assistance to wounded people on the demarcation line.” However, forces in the area were not so lucky. Forty-four peacekeepers were captured when rebel forces began fighting in the area; forty-five Fijian soldiers were released on 11 September after nearly two weeks of captivity. Concerned about future attacks, the United Nations has moved many of the peacekeeping forces to the Israeli side of the demarcation line.

The civil war has also extended into Iraq, with Sunni militant extremists boasting control of Iraq’s western frontier in June. This allowed the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to influence events in Syria and Iraq, as well as branch out into Jordan and Saudi Arabia. In July, ISIS fighters gained control over the Shaer gas field in the Homs province of Syria. This attack was just days after an ISIS offensive in Iraq where ISIS forces ambushed Iraqi forces, decimating most of the volunteer elements of the Iraqi Army. In August the United States authorized manned and unmanned airstrikes in Iraq against ISIS to protect religious refugees. In mid-September the US House of Representatives authorized the training and arming of the Syrian opposition to fight ISIS after the beheadings of prominent prisoners by ISIS. The United States authorized airstrikes in Syria to combat ISIS, but stated it will not do so without support from other countries. On 21 September the United States Ambassador to the United Nations announced that there are other nations willing to support the airstrikes, but would not say which countries were interested in helping. France committed to Iraq-only airstrikes and began within days of the United States. Days later,



Jordan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Qatar also began airstrikes in Iraq.

Also of concern is the potential use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government. In January, following an agreement brokered by the United States and Russia, Syria joined the 1992 Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons. As of September the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons noted that “100 percent of ‘priority chemicals’ and 96 percent of Syria’s chemical weapon stockpile” had been destroyed.

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THE SITUATION IN ISRAEL

In April 2014 the Palestine Liberation Organization and militant Hamas movement signed a pact that would help facilitate a new combined government; in June, an official ceremony was held to swear in the new government. This new government was intended to reunite the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Israeli reaction was strong, noting that Hamas, a terrorist organization, was now being allowed to control the Palestinian government. In response, Israel moved ahead on plans to build settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Throughout the summer tensions have increased in the region, starting with the kidnapping of Israeli teenagers in June who were eventually found murdered. Rocket fire from Gaza into Israel has escalated, resulting in Israeli retaliatory airstrikes. Egypt helped broker a ceasefire in July, but Hamas felt it did not take their concerns into account

and continued attacking Israeli areas. Increased conflict led the United Nations to enact a 72-hour ceasefire at the end of July to get both sides to the negotiating table in Cairo. Fighting continued in violation of the ceasefire throughout August until a more permanent ceasefire was reached on 26 August, with both Israel and Hamas claiming victories. At the end of August, Israel took 1,000 acres of the West Bank, incurring condemnation from the international community, including the United States. In response, Palestinian leaders decided to join the International Criminal Court, giving them more opportunity to prosecute Israeli actions in occupied territories.

Cairo-sponsored peace talks resumed in September and focused on the easing of Israel’s blockade and a guarantee that Palestinian demands will be met. Talks are scheduled to happen first between the rival Palestinian factions: Hamas and Fatah. The talks with Israel began on 24 September and focused on what Israel and Palestine would like to accomplish in subsequent negotiations. Currently, the talks are in recess until the end of October.

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THE SITUATION IN WEST AFRICA

The current epidemic of Ebola began in December 2013 in the nation of Guinea. Over the following months, the disease has spread to Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone in what Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), has called “the largest, most complex and most severe [outbreak] we’ve ever seen.” As of 13 September 2014, there are about 5,000 cases, with a death rate approaching fifty percent.

The affected governments have struggled to deal with the outbreak. Liberia attempted to quarantine the West Point neighborhood of Monrovia, which led to riots and the shooting and death of one teen. Liberia’s own health department and international health experts both



cautioned against the quarantine which proved largely ineffective. After only ten days, the quarantine was lifted.

Curfews are in effect in many affected regions, and health centers are stressed beyond capacity. Once new treatment facilities open, they are immediately filled to capacity, signifying what WHO refers to as “a large but previously invisible caseload.”

On 15 September 2014, the United States announced that 3,000 troops would begin operating in West Africa. They would work to coordinate the international effort to combat the disease, construct additional treatment facilities and distribute 400,000 home protective kits. The next day, the World Bank approved a \$105 million grant aimed at faster epidemic containment. This follows \$50 million in funding by the Gates Foundation. Even with this new assistance, WHO estimates Ebola will ultimately infect 20,000 or more people. On 18 September the Security Council passed Resolution 2177, calling on Member States to lift border restrictions and to provide urgent resources for the countries most impacted by the Ebola outbreak. Two days later Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced the creation of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) and instructed the advance teams to head to the Ghana base by 22 September.

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