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INTRODUCTION

The Contemporary Security Council topics below are current as of Spring 2017 and are not all-inclusive of what the Council might discuss at Conference. With the ever-changing nature of international peace and security, these four topics are a guide to help direct your research for your State's position. A more complete and updated version of likely topics for the Contemporary Security Council will be posted online this fall at www.amun.org.

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 re-ignition of a previous conflict?
- How have similar situations and conflicts been peacefully resolved?
- 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 THE MIDDLE EAST

The Situation in the Middle East is dominated by two separate but interconnected topics: the Syrian Civil War and the threat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). International actions on either front will undoubtedly affect the other, and the geopolitical challenges that plague the region generally, and the Syrian Civil War specifically, complicate executing a more-unified effort against ISIL.

The complexities of the Syrian Civil War have been compounded and complicated by the presence of ISIL in Syria. The large number of anti-Assad factions, of which ISIL is one, has resulted in constantly-shifting tactical and strategic alliances. State-based alliances and actions in the region are also complicated—at various points, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Russia have all been involved in the fight against ISIL but have also supplied various sides in the Syrian Civil War as well. Generally, Sunni-dominated countries, such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia, have supported the rebels, while Shia-controlled states, such as Iran and Iraq, have supported Assad. In short, the Syrian Civil War has resulted in a triangulated conflict and a complex proxy war for the region's and world's most powerful militaries, but one in which the alliances and goals are very murkily drawn.

THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

Bashar al-Assad assumed the presidency of Syria in January 2000; his father was the president of the country from 1971-2000. Assad is also

the commander-in-chief of the Syrian Armed Forces and the General Secretary of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath political party. Assad was once hailed as a reformer in the region, although those hopes have all but vanished since 2012.

As part of the Arab Spring movement in 2011, civilian protesters advocated for a variety of democratic and social reforms including equality for the Kurdish population, the introduction of opposition political parties and freedom of the press. Several days after the protests began, government forces opened fire on protesters in Deraa, where the movement started. The Assad regime made some small conciliatory gestures in the spring, but pressure on the Assad regime intensified and violence spread. The protest movement spread to many of Syria's major cities, including Homs, Aleppo and Damascus. In due course, members of the opposition began to arm themselves against Syrian government forces; later their aims would shift to displacing Assad's loyalist forces.

In 2012, the United Nations and the Arab League sent Kofi Annan as Special Envoy to Syria. A six-point peace plan was announced and accepted by Assad but rejected by the fractious opposition groups that lacked coordinated leadership. In April 2012, the Security Council passed Resolution 2043 to form the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) to monitor cessation of violence. Syria did not cooperate with the mission, and the mandate expired on 19 August 2012. Over time, the regime's response has been increasingly brutal and particularly devastating to Syrian civilians in besieged towns and cities.

The fighting in Syria has ebbed and flowed for more than six years, but the cumulative effects of near-constant fighting have made the humanitarian situation particularly dire. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates that more than 465,000 Syrians have died and more than 12 million have been displaced as a result of the conflict. The rising numbers of refugees and internally-displaced persons have placed pressure not only on Syria but also on neighboring countries as well as Europe. The few humanitarian aid groups and non-governmental organizations operating in Syria report catastrophic conditions related to medical care and basic sustenance needs.

Under the Obama administration, the United States held that defeating ISIL was the highest priority in the Middle East and that it would not make regime change in Syria an explicit goal. Then, in March 2017, under the new American president, Donald Trump, and following evidence that Syrian government forces had used chemical weapons against civilians, the United States launched 59 Tomahawk missiles toward an airfield in Syria, the first direct attack on Assad's regime by US forces. As of May, further shifts in US policy following the Tomahawk strike were unclear.



To date, action in the Security Council has been limited under the persistent threat of Russian or Chinese veto. To date, Russia has vetoed eight resolutions on Syria; the Chinese six. Even efforts to ensure humanitarian aid in Syria have been stymied by complicated geopolitical relationships. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), and numerous United Nations aid convoys have been blocked from providing assistance to the region.

THE ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ AND THE LEVANT (ISIL)

The consequences of the 2003 American invasion of Iraq continue to reverberate in the Middle East. Following the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime, a movement took hold in the region. This movement would eventually become al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Following Al-Zarqawi's death in 2006, the Sunni Awakening and the surge of American troops put added pressure on AQI. By 2008, AQI was on the brink of destruction. Nevertheless, despite the drastic pruning of the organization, it was not defeated.

Over the summer of 2010, the new leader of AQI, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, worked to replenish the organization's leadership, as the US and its partners decreased their military presence and prepared to leave Iraq. After December 2011, AQI went back on the offensive. The expansion into Syria set off a series of internal power struggles between the leadership of al-Qaeda and AQI. The internal struggle gave AQI the chance to expand into Syria. Al-Baghdadi renamed AQI, calling the organization the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The organization is also known as ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria), IS (Islamic State), and Da'esh (an acronym of the group's Arabic name, al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham, but also understood as an insult). In February 2014, ISIL and al-Qaeda severed their ties, reflecting the differing goals between Baghdadi and the senior leader of Al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

With tensions high between the Iraqi government and the Kurdish population, ISIL moved to Mosul and began working to consolidate power and land. On 10 June 2014, ISIL seized Mosul. ISIL declared itself a caliphate on 29 June, claiming exclusive political and theological authority over the world's Muslim population. The seizures of the Iraqi cities of Mosul and Tikrit assisted in connecting ISIL controlled territories thus helping pave the way for ISIL to access oil fields in both Syria and Iraq. Additionally, ISIL has worked to establish state institutions, such as a Council of Ministers, and to recruit additional forces internationally through social media and international media coverage.

The United States and its allies began airstrikes against ISIL territory in the fall of 2014, with minimal success. By early 2015, ISIL was in control of several key areas in Syria and Iraq, including oil fields. On 12 February 2015, the Security Council passed Resolution 2199 condemning both trade with terrorist groups and the paying of hostage ransom fees. Late in 2015, Russia announced it would begin airstrikes, ostensibly contributing to the fight against ISIS, but Russia targeted anti-Assad opposition groups more broadly, suggesting to the international community that Russia's primary interest was in supporting the Assad regime, rather than in defeating ISIL. In 2016 and early 2017, the anti-ISIL coalition made substantial gains in re-taking territory, both in Syria and Iraq—with the Assad regime touting even small victories to bolster the morale of Syrian troops.

Throughout 2016 and the beginning of 2017, ISIL began to take credit for a number of attacks outside of Iraq and Syria—both in the region (e.g., Egypt, Turkey, Libya, Saudi Arabia), and outside (e.g., Germany, France, Belgium, the United States, Indonesia, Bangladesh). For the most part, these attacks appear to be planned by independent local or homegrown terrorists (rather than centrally-planned or financed by ISIL); it is only after an attack is carried out that ISIL leadership claims responsibility for the attacks. This chain of events represents a major departure from the methods of typical terrorist organizations, and it is of great concern to governments around the world. The fully-decentralized and uncoordinated nature of the planning and execution of attacks means traditional counter-terrorism approaches are less successful.

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THE SITUATION IN UKRAINE

Pro-Russia and pro-Western factions within Ukraine have been at odds since 2012 when Ukraine began negotiating to gain membership to the European Union. After Ukrainian independence in 1991,



Russia enjoyed a high level of influence and power in Ukraine. Ukraine's bid for membership in the European Union threatened Russia's influence. As the Ukrainian government moved to enact some of the policy changes required by the European Union, political pressure from pro-Russian groups mounted, igniting a power struggle between pro-Russian groups and those in favor of more integration into western Europe.

The political power struggle came to a head on 21 November 2013, when, in a dramatic policy reversal, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich announced that Ukraine had suspended its plans to sign the European Union agreement and would instead pursue closer ties with Russia. The announcement sparked outrage and civil unrest in many European capitals and spawned protests in Kyiv and across the Ukraine. The protest movement, named Euromaidan, called for closer ties with Europe and the removal of Yanukovich, accusing him and his government of corruption and abuses of power. Matters only worsened as many protests turned violent and clashed with the police. International concern and pressure on the Yanukovich government to respond to protesters' demands grew. On 15 December 2013, the European Union suspended negotiations with Ukraine after Yanukovich failed to address concerns about Russia's involvement in Ukraine. By February, Russian special forces extracted Yanukovich from Ukraine. Upon learning that Yanukovich had fled to Russia, the Ukrainian Parliament responded immediately by removing President Yanukovich and setting up a provisional government until elections could be held.

Following Yanukovich's removal, protesters in Crimea, an autonomous republic within Ukraine with an ethnic Russian majority, made calls to rejoin Russia. The idea garnered broad support within Crimea, including within the Crimean Parliament. On 28 February 2014, Ukrainian officials accused Russia of invading Crimea and trying to incite further violence in Ukraine. Russia denied these charges and noted the troop movements were in line with the agreements with the Ukrainian government for troops stationed in the area. On 16 March, Crimea held a referendum on seceding from Ukraine and becoming part of Russia. Over 90 percent of referendum voters voted to join Russia, and Russia officially annexed Crimea two days later. The United States, the European Union and the United Nations, in A/RES/68/262, called these elections invalid and declared Russia's occupation of Crimea illegal.

Elections were held in Ukraine in May 2014, and Petro Poroshenko was elected President. Poroshenko announced that he would push for early parliamentary elections and would work to mend ties with Russia, with reconciliation contingent on Russia's recognition of Ukraine's territorial claim to Crimea. Even with this progress toward a peaceful solution, violence continued in eastern Ukraine between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russia rebels. The referendum, and Russia's subsequent annexation of Crimea, set off similar movements in two other pro-Russian oblasts (states) of Donetsk and Luhansk in the Donbass region of Ukraine. Both oblasts held independence referendums on 11 May 2014, which favored self-rule and eventual incorporation with Russia. Over the next few months, fighting intensified in Donbass as Ukrainian military forces clashed with separatist rebels in the region. Near the end of August, Russian forces crossed the border to secure the region for the separatists. By the end of the summer, fighting in the region left thousands of people dead or displaced.

As with Crimea, the international community called the Donetsk and Luhansk referendums invalid and condemned Russia's actions toward

annexation. These conflicts have become a flashpoint, exacerbating tensions between Russia, the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The tensions have resulted in a series of economic sanctions against Russia by Western countries.

In September 2014, a ceasefire between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russia rebels was reached. Rebels in Crimea refused to acknowledge actions by the Ukrainian government. In February 2015, Ukraine, Russia and other interested parties adopted the Minsk Agreement to help stem the violence in the eastern portions of Ukraine. This agreement contained provisions for a ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weaponry by both sides to create a demilitarized zone and constitutional reform in Ukraine, among other provisions. The Security Council adopted Resolution 2202 on 17 February 2015, calling on all parties to implement the Minsk Agreement.

Despite the Minsk Agreement, fighting continued and the humanitarian situation in the region continued to erode. The United Nations High Commission for Human Rights released a report in March 2016 alleging torture and abuse on both sides of the conflict. Though the United Nations has tried to investigate these claims further, the Ukrainian government has remained largely unhelpful. This past winter, Russian forces stepped up attacks on the border regions within the Ukraine, heavily shelling border towns and intensifying the humanitarian impact of the conflict.

In a more recent move to put pressure on Russia, President Poroshenko has cut trade ties with the separatist states, hoping the fragile economies will buckle because of a dependence on Russian economic support. But this move also threatens to destabilize politics within Ukraine, as Ukraine relies on the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts for coal, the country's chief power source. The decision was unpopular with many in the Ukrainian Parliament.

The political situation in Ukraine remains largely unchanged since the Minsk agreement, though new questions about the United States' stance toward Crimea have arisen since President Donald Trump took office in January 2017. Though the Trump Administration has not made any official changes to its policy regarding Ukraine, statements President Trump has made have left many in the international community wondering how committed the United States is to restoring the borders of Ukraine.

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NON-PROLIFERATION/DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA

On 27 July 1953, the Korean War ended with an armistice after more than two years of negotiations between the North and the South regions. Since the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea signed the armistice, a demilitarized zone has been in effect. Almost 50 years later, in June 2000, officials of the two countries signed a joint declaration intended to ease military tensions and promote economic cooperation. This cooperation was tested in 2002, when the Democratic People's Republic of Korea admitted they were pursuing a nuclear program. This admission was in violation of both the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), as well as the Agreed Framework that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea held with the United States. As tensions mounted, it became increasingly clear that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea intended to weaponize this nuclear material. This threat led to the Six Party Talks in 2003, which included the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, Japan, China, the Russian Federation, and the United States of America. The Six Party Talks resulted in formal economic assistance to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in exchange for non-proliferation of nuclear weapons technology.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea did not comply with a previous moratorium on testing long-range missiles, and launched several test missiles in July 2006. In response, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1695, which condemned the launches and demanded that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea suspend all activities related to its ballistic missile program. Following Resolution 1695, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea began a series of test missile launches, nuclear weapons tests, uranium enrichment programs and weapon trials. These actions were met with increasingly severe condemnations by the United Nations Security Council and the larger international community. The Security Council adopted Resolutions 1718 in 2006 and 1874 in 2009 in an attempt to resume the Six Party Talks, strengthen the sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and have the Democratic People's Republic of Korea retract its withdrawal from the formerly ratified Treaty on the NPT.

On 17 December 2011, the Supreme Leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Kim Jong-il, suffered a fatal heart attack. His son, Kim Jong-un, formally took power in April 2012. The missile launches and nuclear tests continued under the leadership of Kim Jong-un, and, in October 2012, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea announced that it had a intercontinental ballistic missile capable

of reaching the mainland of the United States. This disclosure came two days after the Republic of Korea unveiled a missile deal with the United States. The Security Council continued to condemn the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's ballistic missile program and urge compliance with Security Council resolutions.

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Director General Yukiya Amano, has expressed deep concern over Democratic People's Republic of Korea's nuclear program, and Member States within the Security Council are persistent with statements critical of Democratic People's Republic of Korea's "highly destabilizing behaviour."

On 30 November 2016, after numerous nuclear tests that were increasing in strength, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2321, which imposed the "toughest and most comprehensive sanctions regime ever" against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, according to then-United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Since then, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has conducted more tests, and state officials within the region have warned of the possibility of a "regional arms race." Between February and April 2017, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea conducted over half a dozen ballistic missile tests, with one test landing within 300 kilometers of Japan. On 28 April 2017, United States Secretary of State Rex Tillerson chaired a meeting of the United Nations Security Council stating that North Korea must take "concrete steps to reduce the threat that its illegal weapons programs pose" before cooperative denuclearization talks can begin.

On 9 May 2017, the Republic of Korea elected Moon Jae-in, who has pledged to work more closely with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un on addressing what he referred to as "the nuclear crisis."

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THE SITUATION IN THE SUDAN AND SOUTH SUDAN

After Sudan gained independence in 1956, violence and political unrest have plagued the country and its neighbors. Two north-south civil wars, with tensions dating back to 1955, have cost the lives of over two million people. The latest north-south civil war began in 1983, following the breakdown of the 1972 Addis Ababa agreement. The agreement intended to appease concerns of the southern Sudan liberation movement, establishing the Southern Sudan Autonomous Region. Despite this degree of autonomy granted to the people of the south, increased marginalization from the north generated additional unrest and sparked the Second Sudanese Civil War.

For more than two decades, the rebel movement of the south, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), fought the Sudanese government over resource infringement and religious determination. On 20 July 2002, the parties to the conflict signed the Machakos Protocol, which restarted the peace process in Sudan and provided that the south could seek self-determination after six years.

In February 2003, intense violence broke out in the western region of Darfur between Sudanese armed forces, local militia and other armed rebel groups. The violence forced hundreds of thousands to flee to Chad, located to the west of Darfur. As the violence escalated and the refugee crisis deepened, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1547 in (blank) of 2004, which approved a special Political Mission, the United Nations Advance Mission in the Sudan (UNAMIS). UNAMIS was mandated to facilitate contacts between the concerned parties and prepare for the introduction of an official peace support operation. As the crisis in Darfur escalated, additional tasks were delegated to UNAMIS relating specifically to Darfur.

After continued clashes over southern autonomy, the government of Sudan and the SPLM/A reached a Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January 2005. Two months later, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1590, which officially established the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS). The Security Council determined that the mandate of UNMIS would be to support the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, along with facilitating the voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons, providing humanitarian and development assistance, and contributing toward international efforts to protect and promote human rights in the Sudan. The mandate of UNMIS was expanded by Resolution 1706 in 2006 to include a peacekeeping force of up to 17,300 troops to protect civilians in Darfur, but the Sudanese government strongly opposed this expansion.

On 31 July 2007, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1769, which augmented the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) and established a joint peacekeeping operation in Darfur: the African Union/United Nations Hybrid Operation in

Darfur (UNAMID). Following South Sudan's independence in 2011, the Sudanese government terminated the presence of UNMIS. Currently, UNAMID is the largest peacekeeping mission in the world, with 19,248 total authorized personnel. The current authorization was established by Security Council Resolution 2296 in (blank) of 2016 and is set to expire on 30 June 2017.

Despite United Nations efforts in the region, ethnic cleansing and systematic rape continue in Darfur. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has alleged that the Sudanese President, Omar al-Bashir, has been ordering the ethnic cleansing of non-Arab individuals in Darfur (ethnic groups such as the Fur, the Masalit and the Zaghawa). The ICC issued an arrest warrant for President al-Bashir in 2009, but he continues to refute the charges. President al-Bashir won another five-year term in April 2015.

South Sudan

On 9 July 2011, the Republic of South Sudan gained independence. The United Nations Security Council welcomed South Sudan by adopting Resolution 1996 on (blank blank) 2011, which established the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS). The Council determined that the mandate of UNMISS was to assist with the post-independence transition, as "the situation faced by South Sudan continued to constitute a threat to international peace and security in the region."

In December 2013, ethnically-charged attacks broke out in South Sudan's Central Equatoria, Jonglei, Lakes, Unity and Upper Nile states, among others. President Salva Kiir accused his former vice-president, Riek Machar, of plotting to overthrow him, which resulted in fighting primarily between the Dinka, President Kiir's ethnic group, and the Nuer, Riek Machar's ethnic group. South Sudan, as the newest country in the world, is also the most under-developed. This means that the fighting is not only about ethnic and political differences, but also an overall lack of resources.

On 27 May 2014, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2155, which reinforced UNMISS and prioritized its mandate toward the protection of civilians, promotion of human rights and support for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The Resolution also supported the implementation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, reached between the government of the Republic of South Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) in January of 2014.

Despite the agreement, unrest in the country has continued. In March 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2206, which outlines sanctions in South Sudan including, but not limited to, a travel ban on South Sudanese entering other Member States and freezing South Sudanese assets in Member State territories.

More than 2.3 million people have been forced to flee their homes since the conflict began, including 1.66 million internally displaced people (IDPs), of which 53.4% are estimated to be children. Only 185,000 of these IDPs have sought refuge in United Nations Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites. Instability in neighboring countries has led 265,700 refugees from the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and the Central African Republic to seek refuge in South Sudan.



As tensions continue to mount and the humanitarian crisis worsens, the United Nations Security Council has stressed that the situation in South Sudan does not have a “military solution.” Seventy nine aid workers have been killed in South Sudan since the conflict began, the most recent of which occurred in March 2017 when six aid workers were ambushed while traveling between Juba, the capital, and the town of Pibor. The current peace process within South Sudan has been described as “not dead” but in need of “significant resuscitation.”

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