GRITMUN
Security
Council
Background Guide

Security Council
Reforms to the United Nations Security Council

Hello Delegates!

We are very excited to introduce you to the Security Council committee at GRITMUN, UMBC's first annual highschool Model United Nations Conference! This background guide will instruct and inform your basal knowledge of the Security Council as an organ of the United Nations, as well as the topic of reforming the Security Council. That said, this background should not be your sole source of research. We encourage you to branch out and find your own resources in order to formulate unique perspectives on the possible ways in which the Security Council could be reformed. Informing yourself is an important and essential way to succeed in committee, and to ensure that you feel comfortable participating with your fellow delegates. We expect this committee's topic to be subjected to rigorous debate, as the reform of the Security Council remains one of the most controversial ongoing issues within the United Nations. We look forward to working with you in April!

Sincerely yours,

Elijah Sharp
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Co-Chairs, Security Council
GRITMUN 2020

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Erected in the aftermath of World War Two along with the rest of the United Nations (UN), the Security Council (the Council) is currently comprised of 15 member states, and was established to maintain peace and security across the international community. The primary purpose of the Security Council is to serve as a quasi-executive branch for the United Nations, maintaining international peace and security. The Security Council is largely responsible for determining the where and when of UN peace operations, settling international disputes, armament regulations, economic sanctions, military actions, membership of states, and has strong influence on the process of appointment of the Secretary General and International Court of Justice (ICJ) judges. The Council has, however, been under intense scrutiny for its lack of effectiveness during many key periods in history. It has been harshly criticized for its lack of response during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, as well as the Srebrenica massacre of 1995 during the Bosnian War. The Council has, however, been successful in carrying out some of its objectives. In 1988, the UNSC was crucial for the full withdrawal of Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

Because of its extensive list of powers and their implications, the Security Council has been a subject of mass debate. The framework that guides the Security Council was created by the superpower victors of World War Two; China, France, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, and the United States, who currently make up the 5 permanent members (P5) of the Security Council. The other 10 member states are comprised of a rotating list of members elected by the General Assembly that serve 2 year terms on the Council. In addition to their permanence, each of the P5 of the Security Council has veto powers, affording any one of them the ability to strike any substantive resolution. The geopolitical landscape since 1945 has changed dramatically, but the Council's power structure has remained stagnant, bringing into question the legitimacy of the capacities held by the council and its permanent members. This has led to calls for reform from members outside the permanent five, whether that be reforming the amount of members in the council, increasing the amount of permanent members, or modifying veto powers.

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Besides a vote in 1965 which increased the number of non-permanent members from six to ten, the council did not have a reform movement until after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1992. As geopolitical powers shifted, demands from various coalitions to restructure the Security Council began to bubble. The first of these demands to become significantly recognized came with the election of Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in 1992, whose "An Agenda for Peace ", advocated for a restructuring of the council to meet the new geopolitical landscape.

While the Secretary General's statements were more focused on peacekeeping than the Security Council, the general sentiment resonated. The result was the first call for reforms to the Security Council by member nations. Recall that the Council was created by the victors of World War Two, and it's provisions for the P5 within the UN charter excluded states that demonstrated significant economic and political power. Two of these states, Japan and Germany, which were already responsible for being the second and third largest financial contributors in the 90s, began proposing their addition to the permanent member list. That argument stretched towards the inclusion of two regional powers, India and Brazil, forming the Group of 4 (G4), a partnership designed to support each other's bids for permanent member status. Beyond seeking permanent membership for themselves, the G4 supports four additional, nonpermanent members, resulting in a 23-nation council. The G4 each want a veto, but they have offered to postpone its use for 15 years.

As major non-permanent members demanded an expansion to the amount of nations, rival regional nations opposed the G4's plans. This group, nicknamed "The Coffee Club", initially composed of Italy, Mexico, Pakistan and Egypt, favored an expansion of non-permanent members based on global regions. The resulting arguments for regional representation, were adopted by other members of the United Nations and led to the creation of the African Group. The African Group demands that no less than 2 permanent seats be given to African states in their proposal of a 26-state Council, a position that few other states support.

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The Security Council has certainly declined in its quantitative measure of adopted decisions. In 2019, the Council adopted only 67 decisions (including resolution and presidential statements), the lowest number achieved in 18 years. Many of the resolutions were extensions or renewals of sanctions or mandates, as numerous proposals were vetoed or otherwise not agreed upon by the elected members. The fall in the number of formal decisions and press statements by the Council heavily correlates to the increased difficulty for nations to find agreements, resulting in many deadlocks. This inefficiency is harmful to the international community and, if it is not addressed, may lead to a heavy reduction of the Council's relevance and sway in the UN and the international community as a whole.

The relations among the P5 have remained strenuous and continue to polarize Council dynamics. For example, Russia and the US have been on opposing sides of many conflicts in the Middle East and Europe. This has resulted in many resolutions seeking to mitigate conflict in these regions being vetoed by either country, slashing chances for the international community to intervene. There are rising tensions with China as it becomes increasingly assertive globally and in the Council, and the US has recently retreated from engaging in several multilateral efforts and has instead chosen to focus more intensely on domestic issues and bilateral agreements.

In addition to the controversy surrounding the P5, the decision of electing the ten non-permanent members of the Security Council (E10) is also under heavy scrutiny. These ten countries are elected by the General Assembly (GA), and it is mandated that they rotate spots every two years with other UN member states from their respective regions. It is the belief of many nations that ten seats is not a sufficient representation of the current geopolitical reality. Many nation blocs advocate for an increase in permanent and non-permanent seats in order to more accurately reflect today's geopolitical situation. Developing countries comprise more than ⅔ of the UN member states, and yet none of the major developing regions have a permanent seat on the Council.

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In addition to the misrepresentation of global relevance, this process has placed enormous limitations on the abilities of the E10 to contribute effectively to the Council's work, as they are face the reality of having such a short time to occupy a position which already places enormous disparity between them and the P5.

This limited amount of time is exacerbated by the heavy agenda that is allocated to the Security Council. While it is understandable that the Council's workload has increased since the UN's conception, it has done very little to manage it's time well. With much of its time during informal consultations being taken up by repetitive speeches and the largely disproportionate time allocated to open debates, given their lack of sway in Council decision making, it's no surprise that the Council's proficiency has decreased heavily since 1945.

The permanent five members have a precarious position from which to consider Security Council reform. Each is resistant to losing their gravitas in the Council, and most of them are not willing to let go of the veto power, much less hand it over to another member state. However, they must respond to the increasing pressure from other member states to reform the Council, or they may face a complete dismissal of the Council's authority on an international scale in the near future. Because of this, all five permanent members have voiced support for increased representation in the Security Council, as well as the enhanced efficiency, transparency, and authority of the Council.

For the most part, Russia is largely resistant to any reform that threatens its grip on power, as it maintains its position as one of the world's most influential superpowers. The Security Council is the only major international forum in which Russia is still considered a major player, so it has a history of supporting reform for increased efficiency of the Council instead of reform regarding more democratic distribution of power. Russia supports an increase in representation--not exceeding 20-21 states--, particularly from developing nations, and has said that it views India as a strong candidate for permanency.

China is also open to the proposal that the Council be expanded, and is insistent that the expansion be focused towards representing smaller developing nations. China also voices the opinion that the Council needs to be optimized for efficiency, transparency, and global authority.

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The United States is of the belief that, while the Council's membership-- permanent and non-permanent-- should be expanded (not beyond 20-21 seats), those that are afforded permanent seats need to be appointed according to their capacity to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and carry out other heavy responsibilities. According to the US, only nations that demonstrate strong global leadership merit a permanent seat on the Council. Also, the US does not support any proposal to alter the veto power.

The United Kingdom and France are both strong vocal supporters of increased representation. Both support the inclusion of new permanent and non-permanent states, as proposed by the G4 and the African Group. Although they have not directly expressed support of affording veto powers to other nations, they have stated that the issue of veto power should not slow down the efforts to reform the Council. They have also both sworn against using the veto power in the case of mass atrocities, and both use the power sparingly as it is.

The Security Council is the most directly consequential and powerful organ within the United Nations. In concept, it's powers enable it to establish and maintain peace among nations. Despite this ideal, the ever-present tensions among nations within the P5 and the inability of the E10 to effectively address many pressing world issues keeps the Council's work largely in stasis.

Although it is agreed that the Council is in dire need of reform, common notions of fairness regarding representation in the Council are hard to come by. Many nations have attempted to introduce reform for this UN body with little success. Major nation blocs include the African Union, the G4, the UFC, and many others, all of which have differing objectives in their reform proposals. Although marginal progress has been made with regards to the E10 electoral procedures, there are still large disparities between the P5 and the E10 and within the E10 itself. Many nations are dissatisfied with the apparent underrepresentation of many nations relative to their global significance. In addition, it is the opinion of many member states that the Security Council's working methods and closed door consultations and meetings are largely undemocratic and non-transparent. This poses many questions regarding the Council's true effectiveness in delivering international peace, and indirectly challenges the Council's authority.

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As delegates, you will be challenged to navigate the butting heads of many nations and nation blocs on key issues regarding reform in order to more evenly distribute power and ability to contribute. The permanent 5 members will maintain the ability to veto substantive resolutions, while procedural votes will only require a simple majority of the member states to be passed. In the real UN, any resolution that moves to increase the number of members of the Council requires an amendment to the UN Charter, which would need a ⅔ majority vote in the General Assembly to pass as well as approval from nine states in the Council, including all five permanent members. Seeing as we have no General Assembly counterpart in our simulation, we will only require the approval of nine members of the Council, including all five permanent members, to pass such a resolution.

Questions a resolution must answer
- In what ways does the Security Council need reform?
- How will your resolution optimize the effectiveness of the Security Council's future endeavors?
- How will your resolution increase levels of transparency within the Security Council?
- How will your resolution more evenly distribute power effectively and fairly among UN member states?
- How will your solution appeal to the P5 members of the Council? Keep in mind that any one of these countries will have the power to veto your resolution if they so choose.

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