

STUDY GUIDE



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Security Council
United Nations

**UNITED NATIONS
SECURITY COUNCIL**

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Security Council

Study Guide

Overview of the Committee

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is a fundamental organ of the UN, charged with the crucial role of maintaining international peace and security. Its mandate, as articulated in the UN Charter, is broad, covering the primary responsibility for addressing threats to peace, acts of aggression, and breaches of the peace. Additionally, the UNSC recommends measures for peaceful resolution and establishes peacekeeping operations.

It consists of 15 UN Member States, 5 of which (the United States, Russian Federation, China, the United Kingdom and France) are permanent members of the body. The other non-permanent 10 members are elected by the UN General Assembly for a term of two years. The criteria for election are based on the ability of a UN Member State to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security and other UN purposes, and the equitable geographic distribution, so that the interests and opinions of each geographic area are represented within the Council (Article 23 of the UN Charter) . Its decisions (commonly referred to as “resolutions”) are binding for all UN Member States, regardless of whether they are addressees of the particular resolution.

In pursuing its mission to maintain international peace and security, when the Council receives a complaint regarding a threat to peace, its first action is usually to suggest that the parties attempt to reach agreement by peaceful means. The Council may introduce principles for such an agreement, launch investigation and mediation, send a mission, designate special envoys or ask the Secretary-General to use their good offices to reach a peaceful settlement of the dispute.

When a conflict results in hostilities, the Council aims primarily to dissolve them as soon as possible. In such a case, the Council may put out ceasefire directives enabling the prevention of an escalation of the conflict, send a peacekeeping force or military observers to contribute to the mitigation of tensions, keep opposing forces apart and create conditions that facilitate the examination of an amicable resolution. Apart from that, the Council may undertake enforcement measures, such as economic sanctions, financial penalties and restrictions, travel bans and arm embargoes, blockade, severance of diplomatic relations or even collective military activity. A main concern, however, is to direct actions on those responsible for practices or policies denounced by the international community, while restricting the impact of the measures on other parts of the population and economy.

The Agenda

Conference Topic

“Discussing the need for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip with the objective of ensuring safe, rapid and unhindered humanitarian access.”

Background

With the election of Netanyahu's far-right coalition in November 2022, political violence between Israel and Palestine escalated with events such as the January 2023 Jenin incursion, the June 2023 Jenin incursion, the July 2023 Jenin incursion, the 2023 Neve Yaakov shooting, the 2023 Al-Aqsa clashes, and the May 2023 Gaza–Israel clashes, resulting in the highest death toll of the conflict since 2005.

This culminated in the 2023 Israel– Hamas war, when Hamas-led militant groups launched a surprise attack on southern Israel from the Gaza Strip, killing hundreds of Israeli civilians and taking hostages on October 7, 2023. The conflict began with a surprise attack by the militants on southern Israel, initiating a significant military escalation, the most substantial since the Yom Kippur War fifty years earlier. Following the expulsion of Hamas militants from Israeli territory, the Israeli military launched extensive aerial bombardments on the Gaza Strip, followed by a large-scale ground invasion starting on October 27. This conflict marks the fifth war in the ongoing Gaza–Israel conflict, which is part of the broader Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the Iran–Israel proxy conflict. Incidents have also occurred in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and along the Israel–Lebanon border involving Hezbollah.

The hostilities began when Hamas-led Palestinian militant groups initiated a surprise offensive called "Operation Al-Aqsa Flood." This offensive involved rocket attacks on Israel, with around 3,000 militants breaching the Gaza–Israel barrier and targeting neighboring Israeli communities and military bases. The attack resulted in the death of 1,139 Israelis and foreign nationals, including 766 civilians. Hamas stated that the attack was in response to the "desecration" of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Gaza Strip blockade, the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, settler violence, and the plight of Palestinian refugees and prisoners. In response, Israel declared a state of war and launched a counteroffensive named "Operation Swords of Iron," with goals including the destruction of Hamas, freeing hostages, and gaining control of the Gaza Strip. Throughout this operation, Israel tightened its blockade, ordered evacuations, and conducted extensive bombings, causing significant damage to homes in Gaza.

Since the start of the Israeli operation, over 24,762 Palestinians, including over 10,000 children and 7,000 women, have been killed in Gaza. Another 7,000 people are missing and presumed dead under the rubble of destroyed buildings. The destruction in Gaza has led to a severe humanitarian crisis, with healthcare collapsing, shortages of food, water, medicine, and fuel, electricity and communication blackouts, and the UN warning of potential famine. The widespread civilian deaths have resulted in accusations of war crimes against both Israel and Hamas. The conflict has internally displaced nearly all of Gaza's 2.3 million population and around 500,000 Israelis, while thousands of Palestinians have been detained by Israel, and Israel has lost 195 soldiers in its counteroffensive as of January 18, 2024.

Global protests throughout the war primarily call for a ceasefire or the release of hostages. Israel and the United States have faced increasing international isolation, with the U.S. vetoing multiple UN Security Council resolutions proposing a ceasefire. A humanitarian pause resolution passed on November 15. During a subsequent seven-day truce, 105 Israeli and foreign hostages were exchanged for 240 Palestinian prisoners. The U.S. military and diplomatic support for Israel has been criticized by human rights groups. Additionally, Iranian-backed militias attacked American bases in Iraq and Syria, and the U.S. and UK

engaged in conflict with the Yemeni Houthi movement over its attacks on ships in the Red Sea that were claimed to be linked to Israel.

Causes of Conflict

The Israel-Palestine conflict has been ongoing since the early 20th century. The conflict originated from the rise of nationalist movements among Jewish and Arab communities both seeking to create a sovereign state in similar regions of the Middle East. At that time, there were nationalist movements worldwide as people of similar cultures and ethnicities began to identify themselves as nations and strove to become independent. Members of the Jewish diaspora sought to create their own independent state with borders, rather than being a nation spread around the world. Following the Second World War, this new movement, known as Zionism, became stronger among Jewish people and many Europeans following the Holocaust. To many, the region of Palestine, with strong ties to the historic land of the Jewish people, seemed to be the best option.

Following a centuries-long Ottoman rule, the area came under British control during the First World War, as stated in the Sykes-Picot Agreement between Britain and France in 1916. The British divided the territory into two states - the Arab Transjordan (McMahon-Hussein Correspondence, 1915) and the Jewish Palestinian state (Balfour Declaration, 1917). Following the Second World War, and amid rising tensions, Britain decided to terminate a mandate to draw borders (Faisal-Weizmann Agreement, 1919) in 1947, and referred to the UN for all matters regarding the future of Palestine. In reaction to this, the UN formed the United Nations Special Committee on the Status of Palestine (UNSCOP). This committee proposed the UN Partition Plan, recommending a partition following the termination of the British mandate. This resolution was adopted in November 1947, creating the independence of the two states of Israel and Palestine, and an International Regime for Jerusalem.

The Partition Plan provided guidelines for the eventual withdrawal of British armed forces and delineation of boundaries between the two states. The Plan sought to address the conflicting claims of the competing movements: Arab nationalism in Palestine and Jewish nationalism in Israel. The Plan also called for an economic union between the two states, and for protections of religious minorities. The plan was accepted by the Jewish populace, while rejected by Arab leaders in an unwillingness to accept any form of territorial division. Arab leaders stated that it violated the principles of national self-determination in the UN charter which granted people the right to decide their own government. Immediately following the Resolution, a civil war broke out. The partition plan was not implemented.

In 1967, the Six-Day War broke out in which Israel seized the West Bank, Gata Sinai, East Jerusalem and the Golan. Regarding these threats and invasions, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 242 sponsored by the United Kingdom. This stressed five different principles: a withdrawal of Israeli forces, peace within secure and recognized boundaries, freedom of navigation, a just settlement of the refugee problem, and security measures that included a demilitarized zone. The last Security Council action was in 1973 - adopting Resolution 338 - which called for a ceasefire in the Yom Kippur War, which broke out in 1973 and was an attempt by a coalition of Arab states led by Egypt and Syria against Israel from October 6th-25th, 1973. Egypt's goal for the war was the expulsion of Israeli forces occupying Sinai. In 1974, the UN General Assembly Resolution 3236 recognised the right of the Palestinian people to

self-determination, national independence, and sovereignty in Palestine. This acknowledged the UN's contact with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), and made them an official representative to the UN. Even though action by the United States is preventing Palestine from becoming an official member state, they were granted Non-Member Observer Status in 2012 by the UN Member States. The move was considered symbolic.

A key issue to consider is the territorial dispute, with continued Israeli encroachment on established Palestinian territory. The Jewish population has continued to set up settlements in the West Bank, despite the territory belonging to Palestine. Additionally, the status of East Jerusalem and the question of which state it belongs to should also be considered. Secondly, the status of the Palestinian people has largely been ignored. According to Article 13 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to return to their country of origin. Israeli forces have not given Palestinian refugees free passage in return to their home country, and in doing so, have caused a demographic collapse in Palestine - and ensured an Israeli majority in the territory. A third issue arises when considering the internal political divisions within the Palestinian state as a result of the Partition. Politics in the state have remained divided between the Hamas, who have control over the Gaza Strip, and the Fatah who are in control of the West Bank. The Fatah are politically inclined toward a peaceful solution, whereas Hamas believe that Palestinians need to be liberated by their own actions. Both parties have declared themselves as the legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people.

Addressing the Issue

A ceasefire was called for on October 24, with UN Secretary-General António Guterres urging an immediate truce. The United Nations General Assembly voted in favor of a resolution supporting a ceasefire, garnering 121 votes in favor, 44 abstentions, and 14 countries voting against it on October 24. US President Joe Biden, on October 24, expressed the condition that hostages should be released before engaging in talks. Hamas chairman Ismail Haniyeh, on November 2, stated that Hamas was prepared for political negotiations for a two-state solution if Israel agreed to a ceasefire and allowed humanitarian aid into Gaza. Despite these developments, both Israel and Hamas rejected calls for a ceasefire on November 6. As of December 13, 2023, Israel and the United States faced increasing isolation as global demands for a ceasefire grew.

Negotiations mediated by Egypt in December proposed a multi-phase plan involving the release of hostages, withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, and the creation of a technocratic Palestinian government. However, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad rejected a permanent ceasefire offer that required them to relinquish control over Gaza and hold democratic elections.

In terms of hostage negotiations, Qatar was reported to be mediating talks between Israel and Hamas for the release of Israeli hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners on October 9. However, Israel publicly denied such negotiations. Egypt also played a role in mediating talks regarding the safety of hostages. Various proposals involving the release of hostages in exchange for ceasefires were discussed, but they were met with rejection or disagreement from key stakeholders.

The UNSC held a meeting on October 8, concluding without a joint statement. The Council passed a resolution calling for a humanitarian pause on November 15. Diplomats urged delay of a full-scale land invasion of Gaza to limit the humanitarian crisis and prevent regional expansion of the war. The U.S. vetoed a UNSC resolution on December 8, leading to criticism from world leaders and human rights organizations. Egypt invoked Resolution 377A, allowing the UN General Assembly to address the issue threatening global security neglected by the UNSC.

Ambassador recalls occurred as Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Jordan, Bahrain, Honduras, Turkey, Chad, South Africa, and Belize severed diplomatic ties with Israel. Reasons cited included Israel's attacks on Gaza, collective punishment, and violations of international humanitarian law.

Both Jordan and Egypt rejected hosting Palestinian refugees fleeing Gaza, emphasizing the need to address the humanitarian situation within Gaza and the West Bank. Egypt, however, expressed willingness to help foreigners and Palestinians with dual-nationalities through the Rafah Border Crossing. In the United States, Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Jamaal Bowman expressed differing views on accepting Palestinian refugees, while former President Donald Trump and Governor Ron DeSantis opposed accepting any Palestinian refugees.

More recently, South Africa filed a significant 84-page legal case in the International Court of Justice (ICJ), alleging that Israel, in response to the Hamas attack, committed genocide. The legal filing specifically accused Israel of killing Palestinians in Gaza, causing them severe bodily and mental harm, and subjecting them to conditions calculated to bring about their physical destruction. The broader implications of Israel's war in Gaza, under increasing international scrutiny, elevate the significance of South Africa's case. While a court victory may not immediately halt the war, experts suggest that it could intensify pressure against Israel's campaign, potentially leading to sanctions and affecting the crucial American backing for the Israeli military. A ruling against Israel could make the Biden Administration more susceptible to domestic opposition to the war and international accusations of double standards, impacting the standing of the United States. Additionally, Indonesia and Slovenia have expressed their backing for a new case against Israel at the ICJ, focusing on alleged violations of Palestinian rights. Both nations have affirmed their participation in the proceedings that aim to seek an advisory opinion on Israel's management and policies regarding the occupied Palestinian territory.

The ICJ is considered the world's most authoritative court, but has limitations similar to the United Nations. It lacks a police force to enforce its rulings, and some nations have chosen to ignore its decisions. For instance, in 2022, Russia ignored an order to halt its invasion of Ukraine. If a nation believes another member has not complied with an ICJ order, it can report the matter to the Security Council, which may or may not choose to take action.

As the chairpersons of UNSC we expect delegates to focus on fostering unity and moving towards a diplomatically viable solution while discussing the key and central issues associated with the topic at hand. We encourage you to keep the scope of debate broad and inclusive while working towards a sustainable solution to de-escalate as well as reconcile, which at the same time is practicable with the long standing foreign policy of member states is the expectation from the head table.

Further Reading

<https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/israeli-palestinian-conflict>

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/un-general-assembly-set-demand-gaza-ceasefire-2023-12-12/>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/11/a-quick-guide-to-south-africas-icj-case-against-israel>

<https://www.newarab.com/news/indonesia-slovenia-back-more-icj-proceedings-against-israel>