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## UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

### Committee Guide

By John Wilson

#### Introduction

Welcome to the United Nation Security Council! The UNSC aims to address global and regional security threats and to intervene in severe crises. Its primary powers are the use of peacekeeping operations, the **levying** of economic sanctions, and the authorization of military action, and it performs these actions through the issuance of resolutions. The UNSC includes representatives from its five permanent members, the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom, as well as ten additional elected members. At HMCE 2009, those ten nations will be Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, and South Africa. Although these are not the nations currently elected to the real UNSC, they are the ones that will be represented in the HMCE version. At HMCE 2009, each delegate in the UNSC will work alone to represent a different member nation.

The UNSC is always in session, ready to step in and **avert** an international crisis at any time. As the world's foremost international security body, members of the UNSC will be involved at the highest levels of any global crisis and will be turned to for leadership on issues with security implications. At HMCE 2009, the two main topics to be discussed in the UNSC are combating global piracy and dealing with the violence and humanitarian crisis in Darfur. Delegates will work both within their committee and with other committees to design thoughtful, innovative, and effective solutions to security and humanitarian situations around the world.

#### History and Background

The UNSC was established in Chapter V of the **United Nations Charter**. It met for the first time in 1946 and has been in continuous session ever since, with officials from all member nations constantly present at UN headquarters in New York City in the event of a crisis. The UNSC was initially comprised of five permanent members and six elected members, and this number of elected members was increased to ten in 1965. The only other major changes to UNSC membership occurred with the Chinese revolution in 1949 and the fall of the USSR in 1991; in both cases, the new **regime** took control of the previous government's seat in the UNSC, though this was a **contentious** move in the

**Levy**—to impose or collect by legal authority.

**Avert**—to see coming and ward off.

**United Nations Charter**—the treaty that forms and establishes the international organization known as the United Nations.

**Regime**—a government in power and its norms and laws; a change in regime is different from a change in leadership unless that leadership establishes a different government.

**Contentious**—tense; full of disagreement.

case of Communist China.

The UN Charter grants the UNSC broad powers to investigate any situation that might threaten international peace and to recommend how best to resolve international disputes. Though these recommendations do not **bind** UN members, the UNSC also has the power to enforce its binding decisions by any means necessary, including militarily. Decisions made under Chapter VII: *Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression* are legally binding, whereas those made under Chapter VI: *Pacific Settlement of Disputes* are non-binding recommendations and generally have no enforcement power.

### At the Conference

The UNSC has a unique voting structure. All resolutions require the approval of nine of the fifteen member nations, but most notably, any of the permanent members may **veto** any resolution regardless of its level of support among the rest of the UNSC or among the **General Assembly**. This obviously grants each of the permanent members a vast amount of power within the organization and has often led to inaction during international crises, like those in Darfur or Rwanda. The United States has most often exercised this veto power, primarily against resolutions critical of Israel. Since 1982, the US has vetoed 32 resolutions critical of Israel, more than the number of vetoes exercised by the other four permanent nations combined over that time period.

This voting structure will be replicated within the UNSC at HMCE, and this will obviously have profound implications for the way decision-making will occur. Since only nine out of the fifteen member states must approve of a resolution in order to pass it, absolute **consensus** among all the UNSC members is not necessary to pass a resolution; however, it is necessary to have consensus among the five permanent members, any of whom can veto a resolution. The permanent members must keep in mind that although they can prevent the UNSC from taking action, they cannot force the UNSC to act. The elected members will not be able to force any resolutions through the UNSC, but neither will the permanent members. Therefore, although complete consensus is not required, there are significant conditions that must be met before a resolution can be passed.

### Preparing for the Conference

A thorough reading of the briefings will be your first step in preparing for the conference. Pay particular attention to the “Guide to Further Research” section, which can prove very helpful in conducting your

**Bind**—to constrain with legal authority.

**Veto**—the power of one department or branch of a government to prohibit the carrying out of projects attempted by another department.

**General Assembly**—one of the five principal organs of the UN and the only one in which all member nations have equal representation.

**Consensus**—an agreement; group unity.

own research. Additionally, after receiving your role assignment, you should research your particular country and study any policies or statements it has made with regards to piracy or Darfur. Research what legislation has been passed or debated, and read any comments or speeches that have been made by relevant government officials, such as the president or the prime minister. Before the conference, you should also consider solutions that your country would favor, bearing in mind the importance of building consensus with other member nations. It would also be helpful to read some previous UNSC resolutions to preview what you are expected to produce at the conference, as looking closely at the scope and specificity of older UNSC resolutions should help you in crafting solutions to today's problems. If you should have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the HMCE Chair of the UNSC Sam Roosz at roosz@fas.harvard.edu.

## Conclusion

As a prominent and powerful international body, much of the global community turns to the UNSC to provide security and resolve disputes. The genocide in Darfur and the growing presence of piracy are both looming crises that the UNSC can address, and many expect it to do so. As members of the UNSC, you are uniquely placed to promote international peace and stability. However, in order to do so, you must be informed, make good decisions, and build the support necessary to make the UNSC a vehicle for sound policies. With the increased focus on cooperation among the international committees at HMCE 2009, delegates will have **unprecedented** opportunities to gain consensus, and we are excited for what will surely be an exciting and dynamic UNSC committee!

**Unprecedented**—*never having occurred before; having no precedent.*