Background Guide

# Security Council

## Topic I - [The Situation in Venezuela](https://www.amun.org/handbooks/2019/2019-handbook/the-security-council/#the-situation-in-venezuela)

The economic, political and refugee crisis in Venezuela, an oil-rich country and OPEC member in South America, continues unabated and threatens to destabilize the region.

From 1999 to 2013, Venezuela was governed by President Hugo Chavez, whose time as leader was characterized by nationalization of the oil industry and lavish spending on public health, infrastructure and jobs. Under his administration, per capita income doubled, and unemployment and poverty were cut in half.

Although the transition of power from President Chavez was peaceful, his successor had to manage increasingly difficult economic conditions. On 5 March 2013, President Chavez died from cancer. His designated successor, Nicolas Maduro, was duly elected a few months later. Maduro took power soon before the price of oil, on which most of Venezuela’s economy depends, began decreasing rapidly. Without the oil wealth coming in, Venezuela’s unfettered spending began to cause economic problems. On 30 December 2014, the Venezuelan Central Bank confirmed that the country had entered a recession, and the year-over-year inflation rate hit 68 percent by the end of the year. By the end of 2018, the Central Bank [claimed its data showed a 130,060 percent year-over-year inflation rate](https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/29/economy/venezuela-inflation-intl/index.html) for the Venezuelan bolivar. The International Monetary Fund believes the Central Bank is understating the data and estimates the 2018 rate at 929,797 percent. As a result of the inflation, ordinary Venezuelans have great difficulty buying food and paying for their day-to-day living expenses, and there is a thriving black market for US dollars.

The political situation in Venezuela also deteriorated. With the economy failing, the opposition party increased its political attacks on Maduro and gained a two-thirds supermajority in Venezuela’s National Assembly in 2015. Maduro responded by adding justices loyal to him to the country’s Supreme Court. In 2017, the Supreme Court effectively annulled the National Assembly and banned an opposition candidate from running for election. Mass protests erupted the next day, and while the Supreme Court walked back its decision, months of protests resulted in more than 100 deaths. Maduro’s next plan to consolidate power was to create a new parallel legislature called the Constituent Assembly in July 2017 with the mandate of drafting a new Venezuelan constitution. The Democratic Unity Roundtable, the opposition party, boycotted the election of the Constituent Assembly. Opposition members’ fears materialized the following month when the Constituent Assembly voted to give itself supreme legislative power and strip the National Assembly of its legislative powers. [Over 40 countries](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/fear-spreads-in-venezuela-ahead-of-planned-protest-of-controversial-election/2017/07/28/caef4bd4-73a0-11e7-8c17-533c52b2f014_story.html) as well as the European Union and the Organization of American States did not recognize the election of the Constituent Assembly.

Maduro was elected to a second six-year term in May 2018 in an election [criticized as a “sham” by the United States and denounced by the Lima Group of 14 countries in North and South America](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-election-reaction/re-elected-venezuelas-maduro-faces-global-criticism-us-sanctions-idUSKCN1IM0CT). On 10 January 2019, shortly after Maduro’s inauguration, Juan Guaidó, president of the National Assembly, declared himself interim president of Venezuela and called for Maduro’s removal. Many countries quickly declared their support for Guaidó, including the United States and most of Venezuela’s neighbors. The United States applied sanctions to Venezuela’s oil exports after Venezuela cut diplomatic ties in January 2019, and President Donald Trump has occasionally threatened military action against the Maduro regime. Russia has intermittently supplied Venezuela with military equipment and advisers.

The additional sanctions, combined with Guaidó’s proclamation, set off a new round of widespread protests. According to the United Nations Human Rights Office, at least 40 people have been killed and 696 have been arrested since the latest wave of protests began. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that over 4 million Venezuelans have fled the country, mostly to Colombia and Peru, due to the ongoing food insecurity and poverty. The course of this crisis depends much on Venezuela’s military which, despite pleas by the United States to change its mind, continues to back Maduro.

The Security Council has met several times in 2019 to discuss the issue, each time failing to pass a resolution. A meeting on 28 February saw debate on [two competing draft resolutions](https://www.whatsinblue.org/2019/02/venezuela-two-competing-draft-resolutions.php). Russia and China vetoed the United States-led resolution expressing concern over the economic collapse and refugee crisis, and calling for the “peaceful restoration of democracy and the rule of law.” Russia’s competing draft resolution, which denounced all threats of force against Venezuela as well as interventions in what Russia claims to be domestic matters, failed to receive enough votes to pass. The Security Council has been briefed on the situation throughout the summer, and tensions between Council members who support Maduro and those who support Guaidó remain high, with the future government of Venezuela and the fate of millions of displaced and starving Venezuelans at stake.

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## Topic II - [The Situation in the Middle East](https://www.amun.org/handbooks/2019/2019-handbook/the-security-council/#the-situation-in-the-middle-east)

The situation in the Middle East is multifaceted. Due to pressing threats to international peace and security, the Security Council’s primary concerns in the region are the Syrian and Yemeni civil wars and humanitarian and security concerns in the states of Iran and Iraq. While efforts to address these concerns share a number of geopolitical priorities, each situation remains unique.

[***Syria***](https://www.amun.org/handbooks/2019/2019-handbook/the-security-council/#syria)

Although less intense than it was through 2018, the civil war in the Syrian Arab Republic is still devastating the country after eight years of heavy fighting. The war has its roots in 2011, when the Arab Spring movement spawned local movements in Syria calling for a series of reforms, such as social and democratic reform, investigation of violence perpetrated by police and military forces and the release of political prisoners. Following Arab Spring-affiliated protests, President Bashar al-Assad, who also serves as commander-in-chief of the Syrian Armed Forces, ordered a severe crackdown on all protesters and suspected dissidents. A series of state-sanctioned military strikes against rebel militants and civilians followed. The Assad regime made some minor conciliatory gestures in the spring of 2011, but protesters were unsatisfied, violence continued to spread, and the United States and European Union increased economic pressure by tightening sanctions on the Assad regime. Syrian government forces continue to battle rebel groups across Syria, even employing banned chemical weapons against military and civilian targets in April and July 2018. Violence and political upheaval continues to run rampant in Syria, which has led to one of the worst humanitarian crises in modern times.

Further complicating the situation in Syria is the presence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). From 2013 to 2017, Syria served as a stronghold for ISIL, as it exploited vacuums in governance and political stability. ISIL controlled several major cities, including Raqqa, which served as their de facto capital in the country. The al-Nusra Front, an affiliate of the terrorist organization Al-Qaida, also operates in Syria against the Syrian government. The United States and its coalition partners—mainly the United Kingdom, France, Jordan and Turkey—have been conducting air and missile strikes on ISIL and some rebel targets in Syria since 2014 and against Syrian government targets since early 2017. In 2015, Russia also joined in providing aerial support against ISIL. While they are both opposed to ISIL and the various Al-Qaida affiliates, the United States-led coalition and Russia have different allies and military objectives in the region. Unlike the United States, Russia [intervenes in the country with the blessing of the Syrian government](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-10-19/putin-officials-said-to-admit-real-syrian-goals-are-far-broader), and intends to maintain a permanent military presence there. It has also struck anti-Assad rebel groups that the United States considers to be allies. The Kurdish population that controls northeastern Syria has assisted both the coalition and Russia in fighting against ISIL, but also demands recognition as their own independent state, which Turkey opposes. United States and Russian airstrikes, while helpful in decimating ISIL-held targets, have also killed and injured thousands of Syrian citizens.

To date, action in the Security Council has been limited mainly because Syria’s military ally, Russia, vetoes any resolutions that take significant action against the Syrian government. Through April 2018, Russia has [used its veto power twelve times](https://www.rte.ie/news/world/2018/0411/953637-russia-syria-un-veto/) to block resolutions taking humanitarian, investigative or other action in Syria. In February 2017, Russia and China vetoed sanctions against Syria for human rights violations and use of chemical weapons. In April 2018, the Security Council failed to adopt a resolution on chemical weapons use by the Assad regime due to Russian veto. This resolution would have established an official United Nations-led investigation to identify who used chemical weapons. In a statement to the Security Council in April 2018, Chinese Ambassador Ma Zhaoxu expressed support for Russian military intervention in Syria, and encouraged the Council to focus on humanitarian aid rather than punitive measures against the Syrian regime.

Outside of the Security Council, many states have taken action in response to the rising death tolls and humanitarian crisis: Turkey has accepted and is housing millions of refugees; the Russian Federation has provided financial and military aid to the Assad regime; and France, the United Kingdom and the United States carried out a wave of punitive airstrikes against Syrian regime targets following chemical attacks against civilians in April 2018. Because the Syrian government permits few foreign aid programs to formally intervene in the Syrian humanitarian crisis, the rest of the international community has primarily assisted via unilateral actions such as monetary aid for displaced peoples and counter-cyber-terrorism efforts to limit ISIL’s recruitment efforts. The number of deaths and displaced peoples in this crisis continues to rise, but political concerns as well as the conditions on the ground have prevented humanitarian aid and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from successfully operating in Syria.

In September 2018, Russia, Iran and Turkey brokered a short-lived ceasefire. It did not hold for long, as fighting continued and the Assad Regime prepared additional assaults on Idlib province. Rebel factions still control Idlib, although government forces have increased attacks on the region in recent months. Turkey has supplied weapons to Syrian rebels’ remaining holdouts in the region, and Syrian government forces make their attacks on the remaining rebel strongholds with Russian air support.

The Assad regime appears determined to retake Idlib at any cost, a position which has drawn criticism because many of the rebels who surrendered elsewhere in the country were allowed to travel to Idlib, in some cases even provided transport by the Syrian government. Of the three million people in Ilib, one million are children, and 1.3 million fled to Idlib from elsewhere in Syria. On 3 June 2019, Russia reportedly blocked a statement at the Security Council that would have called on all combatants to protect civilians in Idlib.

In May 2019, all members of the Security Council except for Russia, China, South Africa and Indonesia made a public statement expressing concern about the fighting in Idlib and the potential for the situation to become a more significant humanitarian catastrophe, after meeting in consultation with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). This statement did not get the unanimous support it would have needed to be issued formally.

[***Yemen***](https://www.amun.org/handbooks/2019/2019-handbook/the-security-council/#yemen)

The situation in Yemen has been unstable since the Arab Spring movement in 2011 and the onset of civil war in 2014. In response to protests during the Arab Spring, state-sanctioned violence against civilians escalated to the point that hundreds were killed and thousands were injured in a few short months. In October 2011, the Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2014, calling on President Ali Abdullah Salih to step down from his position and for all parties to cease fighting. Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, the former president’s second in command, assumed power in early 2012 when former President Salih agreed to vacate his office. However, President Hadi’s term was plagued with instability, political upheaval and violence. Hadi’s government was overthrown by Houthi rebels (Shia political insurgents) in 2014, and parliament was dissolved. President Hadi was moved out of the country in 2015, and, as of July 2019, he is living in exile in Saudi Arabia, although he has traveled to the United States for medical treatment and did [make a visit to appear before the divided parliament in the loyalist province of Hadramout](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-election/yemen-leader-in-exile-hadi-returns-for-meeting-of-divided-parliament-idUSKCN1RP0CS). Since the Houthi coup in 2014, Yemen has been plagued by constant violence and humanitarian crisis. The instability in Yemen has encouraged many militant groups such as Al-Qaida, Al Dahle and ISIL to gather and operate in the region.

Indiscriminate artillery attacks by a coalition of nine African and Middle Eastern countries (led by Saudi Arabia) against Houthi rebels and other militant groups to regain control of the country on behalf of President Hadi and his government continue to kill civilians and further destabilize the country. The coalition received at various times both logistical and military support from the United States.

In February 2014, the Security Council passed Resolution 2140, establishing sanctions against Yemen in response to the rampant violence and egregious human rights violations. In February 2015, the Security Council passed Resolution 2201, deploring the Houthi action to dissolve parliament and calling upon all armed actors in Yemen to impose a ceasefire and arms embargo. In February 2019, the Security Council renewed the asset freeze, arms embargo and travel ban associated with the 2014 sanctions. In December 2018, negotiators from all sides met in Stockholm, Sweden to work out a ceasefire under the auspices of the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths. These negotiations resulted in a ceasefire: now known as the Hodeidah Agreement, also known as the Stockholm Agreement. As part of the agreement, the Council passed Resolutions 2451 and 2452, creating the United Nations Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNHMA) and the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) to oversee implementation of the agreement and withdrawal of forces from both sides from certain port cities.

A large component of the humanitarian crisis is the inability for aid workers to get into the country and distribute medical treatment and food due to ongoing fighting, especially in the port city of Hodeidah. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, over 24 million Yemeni citizens are categorized as in need of aid, with more than 7.4 million at acute risk of famine. Since the start of the crisis, over 4.3 million people have fled their homes, and only 1 million have been able to return.

From 11 to 14 May 2019, the Houthi rebels unilaterally withdrew their forces from Hodeidah, Saleef and Ras Isa, monitored and verified by UNHMA. The head of UNMHA and Griffiths explained that they accepted the Houthi offer to withdraw unilaterally because negotiations on the second phase of withdrawals were proving to take more time than expected, and the quick withdrawal would allow United Nations aid teams to enter the ports, distribute aid and assist the Yemeni port authority.

The Yemeni government criticized the withdrawals because they were not allowed to verify the withdrawals and were not included in the monitoring process conducted by the RCC. They also pointed out that on the same day the United Nations confirmed the redeployments, the Houthis attacked two Saudi oil-pumping stations with drones. Fighting continues in the south of Saudi Arabia and several regions of Yemen, including the capital, Sana’a; the al-Dhale governorate in the south; and the Abs district of the Hajjah governorate.

The Security Council is currently focused on implementing the Hodeidah Agreement, especially planning the second phase of redeployments and deciding on who will be allowed to contribute to the standing security forces in Hodeidah. In June and July of 2019, Griffiths briefed the Council on the ongoing implementation of Resolutions 2451 and 2452. He noted that while violence in Hodeidah and elsewhere in Yemen has continued to decrease since the agreement was concluded, disagreement between the Yemeni government and the Houthis remains on other aspects of the agreement, such as the exchange of prisoners and the division of revenue from the port. Additionally, Griffiths stated that the attacks on civilian targets in southern Saudi Arabia threaten to derail the entire process, as “war can take peace off the table.”

[***Iran***](https://www.amun.org/handbooks/2019/2019-handbook/the-security-council/#iran)

Tensions between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United Nations over its nuclear program are nothing new. However, in the three years since 2015, tensions were at their lowest point in decades after a deal to limit Iran’s nuclear program was concluded.

After many years of negotiation, on 14 July 2015, Iran, along with the United States, the Peoples’ Republic of China, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the European Union signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In exchange for relief from economic and trade sanctions from the United States, the European Union and the Security Council, Iran agreed to significantly reduce or eliminate its stockpiles of enriched uranium and centrifuges, refrain from building any new heavy-water nuclear facilities for 15 years, and impose a limit on uranium enrichment of 3.67 percent for 15 years. Iran also agreed to allow the United Nations’ International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to monitor and verify Iran’s compliance with the JCPOA. The Council unanimously passed Resolution 2231 on 20 July 2015, which endorsed the completed deal but contained some restrictions on arms sales and ballistic missile testing and launches.

U.S. President Donald Trump has been a vocal critic of the JCPOA. On 8 May 2018, the United States unilaterally withdrew from the agreement, claiming violations by Iran. The IAEA maintained at the time that [Iran was abiding by its commitments under the JCPOA](https://www.apnews.com/544bd03f7f264e57827fba5ca99fa5ff). The United States also claimed that the deal did not do enough to limit Iran’s ballistic missile activity or its support of destabilizing regional militias such as the Houthis in Yemen. The western European signatories to the deal—France, the United Kingdom and Germany—agree with these complaints but continue to support the JCPOA as the best way to limit Iran’s nuclear program.

In November 2018, United States President Donald Trump reimposed oil and financial sanctions against the Iranian regime, citing alleged missile and nuclear programs. Germany, France, Russia and China opposed this action. The IAEA assured States that Iran was not undertaking such programs. Iran has stated it will continue to comply with the 2015 agreement and work with the other signatories, despite the United States abandonment of the deal and imposition of sanctions.

Despite these statements, increasing tensions jeopardize both Iranian compliance and international acceptance that Iran is complying. France, Germany and the United Kingdom sent a letter in February 2019 to the Security Council claiming that Iran had pushed the boundaries of Resolution 2231 by conducting a series of ballistic missile and satellite launch vehicle tests in January 2019. In April 2019, for the first time, the United States [designated a branch of a foreign government’s military as a terrorist organization](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/08/world/middleeast/trump-iran-revolutionary-guard-corps.html)—Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps—which the United States accuses of supplying arms and financial support to terrorist groups such as the Houthis in Yemen and Shia militias in Iraq. This designation allows the United States to target members of this group in ways that are normally forbidden by international humanitarian law. Iran immediately responded by designating the United States armed forces deployed in the Middle East as terrorists.

On 8 May 2019, one year to the date from its withdrawal from the JCPOA, the United States imposed another round of sanctions against Iran’s aluminum, copper, iron and steel sectors. Iran responded with a [60-day ultimatum to the remaining parties to the JCPOA](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-europe-usa/iran-urges-europe-to-normalize-economic-ties-with-it-or-face-consequences-idUSKCN1TA05P): Lift sanctions on its oil and financial sectors, or it will resume enriching uranium beyond the JCPOA limits and building its Arak nuclear reactor, which would also be a direct violation. This ultimatum was rejected by the remaining parties to the JCPOA who called on Iran to abide by its commitments. Iran claims that this latest round of sanctions shows that the United States is not negotiating in good faith.

On 12 May 2019, four oil tankers at anchor at the port of Fujairah near the Strait of Hormuz were sabotaged. The Strait of Hormuz is a sole and narrow passage between the Persian Gulf and the open ocean. Initial findings [presented to the Security Council on 7 June 2019](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48551125) by the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Norway claimed a state actor was behind the attack but stopped short of directly blaming Iran. The United States publicly stated that it believes Iranian actors carried out the attack.

The United States’ allies in the region that are directly opposed to Iran include Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Israel. On 24 May, President Trump invoked an emergency powers provision of arms sale legislation to approve an $8.3-billion arms sale to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan over the objections of the United States Congress, citing an Iranian threat. In May 2019, citing an unidentified but credible threat, the United States deployed a carrier group to the Persian Gulf and increased its troop deployment in the area by 1,500 soldiers, including 600 troops that were scheduled to return home but have had their deployments extended.

Countries in Europe are attempting to design an alternative to the dollar-based payment system for Iran to use if it is frozen out of the United States-led international payments system. The United States has become isolated from the other Council members who are parties to the agreement—China, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Russia—who maintain that the JCPOA is still valid and frequently call on all parties to refrain from escalating.

In June 2019, the Council [received the Secretary-General’s report](https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13862.doc.htm) on the implementation of resolution 2231 as well as reports from the JCPOA’s Joint Commission and the Council’s Resolution 2231 facilitator. The Secretary-General’s report focused on the components of the resolution dealing with nuclear materials and noted Member States’ conflicting viewpoints on whether Iran’s ballistic missile tests which occurred in late 2018 and early 2019 violate provisions of the JCPOA. Debate within the Council is ongoing as the remaining parties to the agreement attempt to find some way in which it can be saved.

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