Committee History and Structure
Security Council[1]

September 10, 2012

The United Nations Security Council was created by the United Nations Charter, which came into effect on 24 October 1945. According to the Charter, the UN has three purposes:

1. To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace;
2. To develop friendly relations among nations based on … equal rights and self-determination of peoples;
3. To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights...[2]

Responsibility for each of these goals is shared between the General Assembly, in which each member state has one vote, and the Security Council with limited membership and special voting rules.

The Security Council shares responsibility for the first goal (international peace and security) with the General Assembly (GA), especially the General Assembly First Committee (disarmament and security). Responsibility for the second goal (equal rights and self-determination) is shared by the GA and Trusteeship Council.[3] Responsibility for the third goal (international economic and social cooperation, and human rights) was originally shared by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Since 2006, responsibility for the human rights portion of the third set of goals has rested with the GA and the new Human Rights Council (HRC).[4]

Although the Security Council, Trusteeship Council, Economic and Social Council, and Human Rights Council are each charged with supervising the achievement of one UN goal, these councils have very different capabilities. Specifically, the Security Council is much more powerful than the others. The UN Charter makes it clear that "the founders envisioned the Security Council as the UN's premier body, charged with the most essential security tasks."[5] In addition, the Charter gave the Security Council far more authority to act on security matters than the other councils have to act on economic, social, and humanitarian matters.

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[1] This background guide was written by Karen Ruth Adams, faculty advisor, with contributions from David Shelton (2007), Aimee Ryan (2008), and Samantha Stephens (2010). Copyright 2012 by Karen Ruth Adams.

[2] United Nations, "Charter of the United Nations," 26 June 1945, Chapter I, Article 1, http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/.

[3] The Trusteeship Council suspended operations in 1994, when Palau, the last remaining United Nations trust territory, became independent. United Nations Trusteeship Council, http://www.un.org/documents/tc.htm.

[4] United Nations Human Rights Council, website, http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/ See also "Charter of the United Nations, Chapter XIII, Article 87.

[5] Karen A. Mingst and Margaret P. Karns, *The United Nations in the 21st Century*, 3rd edition (Boulder: Westview, 2007), p. 27.

The authority of the Security Council is evident in four ways. First, the Security Council's resolutions do not need to be passed by any other UN committee to go into effect. By contrast, the other councils simply make recommendations to the GA; their resolutions are not enacted until they are passed by the GA. Second, GA resolutions are simply recommendations, whereas Security Council resolutions are binding. When states join the UN, they agree to abide by Security Council decisions. Third, the GA can address issues related to international peace and security only if they are not currently under consideration by the Security Council. Finally, unlike other UN committees, the Security Council can take steps to enforce its decisions. The only exception to this is with regard to the UN budget, over which the GA exercises full control.[6]

Thus the Security Council plays a unique role at the United Nations. It also has a unique structure, in that there are five permanent members with veto power. Due to US-Soviet rivalry during the first 45 years of its existence, the Security Council was almost completely paralyzed, despite the high hopes of its founders. Although the Council has been more active since the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the interests of the permanent five members continue to determine the actions and effectiveness of the Security Council.

Membership, Voting, and Leadership

The membership of the Security Council consists of 15 member states, ten of which are elected biannually from the General Assembly. The other five members are permanent members to whom the Charter gave both permanent seats on the Council and permanent vetoes. These states are the United States, France, the United Kingdom, the Russian Federation, and the People's Republic of China. In 1963, the General Assembly agreed that the 10 rotating members should be geographically distributed, as follows:

-- five from Africa and Asia (subsequently divided into two for Asia and three for Africa);
-- one from Eastern Europe
-- two from Latin America, including the Caribbean
-- two from Western Europe and Other states (including Australia, Canada, and New Zealand)

Elections for the five rotating seats available annually can be contentious. In 2011, there was more than one candidate for all but one of the open seats.[7]

In voting procedure, according to Chapter V, Article 27 of the UN Charter, nine votes are required to pass all procedural matters, and all "non-procedural" or substantive matters (for example, resolutions and reports) require a vote of nine and an affirmation or abstention from all permanent members.[8]

The presidency of the Security Council changes monthly and passes from one member state to another according to the alphabetical ranking of state names (in English). Unlike the GA, which holds an annual conference that opens in September of each year, the Security Council meets and passes resolutions continuously.

History and Challenges

The United Nations was formed in 1945, after World War I (1914-1919) and World War II (1939-1945) had together killed approximately 70 million people.[9] It was founded by the World War II Allies (the US, UK, France, Russia, and China).

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[6] United Nations, "Charter of the United Nations," Chapter IV, Article 12; Chapter V, Article 25; Chapter VII; and Chapter IV, Article 19.

[7] Security Council Report, "Security Council Elections 2011," http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2011-10/lookup_c_glKWLeMTIsG_b_7751821.php

[8] United Nations, "Charter of the United Nations," Chapter X, Article 27.

[9] Matthew White, "Source List and Detailed Death Tolls for the Twentieth Century Hemoclysm," November 2005, http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/warstat1.htm.

The Allies gave the official name of their alliance (the United Nations) to an organization they created to replace the League of Nations, which was created at the end of World War I and failed to prevent the outbreak of World War II. As scholars Karen Mingst and Margaret Karns explain, the World War II Allies

> agreed that the organization would be based on the principle of the sovereign equality of members and that all "peace-loving" states would be eligible for membership, thereby excluding the Axis powers -- Germany, Italy, Japan, and Spain. It was also agreed that decisions on security issues would require unanimity of the permanent members of the Security Council -- the great powers. [10]

In addition to giving the Security Council priority on issues related to international peace and security, the founders gave the Council important tasks related to the operation of the United Nations. For example, the UN secretary general is appointed and new Member States are admitted to the UN "by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council." [11] Similarly, both Security Council and GA approval is required to appoint judges to the International Court of Justice.[12] The issue of UN reform is much the same. To revise the Charter, the GA and the Security Council must together call for a review conference. Amendments go into effect only with a two thirds vote in the General Assembly and ratification by "two thirds of the Members of the United Nations, including all the permanent members of the Security Council."[13]

Together, these provisions mean that the Security Council, especially the permanent five (P-5) members, have both short-term and long-term control over what happens at the UN. This makes it very difficult to address a wide variety of reform issues, from making GA resolutions binding, to changing the criteria for admitting new members to the UN or changing the structure of the Security Council.

In principle, these provisions would seem to enable the Security Council to alter the UN in ways the P-5 desire. In fact, however, disagreements between P-5 members mean that the Security Council is often stymied. From 1945-1990, the Council was largely paralyzed by the Cold War between the US and Soviet Union. Since the collapse of the U.S.S.R. and the emergence of capitalist Russia, there have been many more Security Council meetings and many more resolutions. This is largely because the unrivaled power of the United States has caused the US to encounter less opposition to resolutions it sponsors. Previously, the US had to worry not only about the Soviet veto but also the prospect of war with the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union fell apart, yielding a much-weaker Russia that needed US assistance in many ways, a major obstacle to the functioning of the Security Council was removed.

Yet the veto is still a very powerful and often-used tool because it is one of the only ways other states can stand up to the United States. For example, the threat of a veto by China, Russia, and France prior to the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 meant that the US and UK withdrew a resolution authorizing the use of force. This was not the end of the story, however. The US and UK simply invaded Iraq invasion without Security Council approval. Because Iraq had not attacked the US or UK, the invasion was a violation of the UN Charter, which requires all member states to refer all matters of peace and security to the Council except in the case of self-defense.[14] But because the US and UK can veto any Security Council resolution punishing them for the war against Iraq, no effort has been made pass such a resolution. Thus although the Security Council has been more active since the end of the Cold War, its actions have not always conformed to the Charter. In fact, in many ways, the post-Cold War period

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[10] Mingst and Karns, *The United Nations in the 21st Century*, p. 27.

[11] United Nations, "Charter of the United Nations," Chapter XV, Article 97; and Chapter II, Article 4.

[12] International Court of Justice, "Statute of the International Court of Justice," Chapter I, Article 4, http://www.icj-cij.org/documents/index.php?p1=4&p2=2&p3=0.

[13] United Nations, "Charter of the United Nations," Chapter XVIII, Article 108.

[14] United Nations, "Charter of the United Nations," Chapter I, Article 2.

confirms the failure of the Security Council to hold all states accountable for breaches of the peace and acts of aggression.[15]

When the P-5 agree that a non-P-5 member has violated the Charter, the Security Council can authorize military action, as it did in 2007 in Darfur, Sudan.[16] Chapter VII of the UN Charter lays out the Council's options for the use of force in these situations. In general, the pertinent Security Council resolution authorizes member states to carry out military missions using their own forces. The Military Staff Committee established in the Charter has never been activated due to reluctance of the P-5 states to share military information, coordinate logistics, and contribute troops to jointly-commanded operations. [17]

In practice, most Security Council resolutions simply urge negotiation to settle disputes and offer the Council's "good offices" to investigate the situation, organize talks between the groups in question, etc. For example, in 2007

> [t]he U.N. Security Council … unanimously passed a resolution that expanded the mandate of its mission in Iraq. Resolution 1770 was hailed as a new phase of the U.N. Assistance Mission for Iraq, or UNAMI. The resolution says the U.N. seeks to "foster regional dialogue" on matters such as "border security, energy and refugees." It also says the U.N. will work with Iraqis to "resolve disputed internal boundaries" and promote discussion on national reconciliation.[18]

Another tactic often used by the Security Council is to impose military, diplomatic, and economic sanctions, as it did against Iraq from 1990 to 2003.[19] The goal of sanctions is to focus international, corporate, and public pressure on a state so it cannot sustain itself unless it changes the offending policies. In practice, most sanctions regimes develop leaks that enable states to export at least some of their products to raise cash and to import at least some of the military and economic goods they need. Usually it is the weakest members of society who suffer most from sanctions.[20]

Recent and Current Events

In 2011, the Security Council held 235 meetings, of which 213 were public and 22 were private. Thirteen of the private meetings were with UN member states that contribute police and troops to UN peacekeeping operations. These numbers are dramatically higher than before the end of the Cold War and similar to other years between 2001 and 2011. [21] According to the UN Secretariat,

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[15] Michael J. Glennon, "Why the Security Council Failed," *Foreign Affairs,* May/Jun 2003, http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20030501faessay11217/michael-j-glennon/why-the-security-council-failed.html.

[16] "Security Council Authorizes Deployment of United Nations-African Union 'Hybrid' Peace Operation in Bid to Resolve Darfur Conflict," United Nations News Centre, http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/sc9089.doc.htm.

[17] United Nations, "Charter of the United Nations," Chapter VII.

[18] "United Nations Considers a Greater Role In Iraq," *CNN*, September 23, 2007, http://www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/09/22/un.iraq/index.html#cnnSTCVideo. Like other Security Council resolutions, the full text of this resolution is available on the Security Council website, http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/index.html.

[19] "Sanctions against Iraq," *Global Policy Forum*, http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/sanction/indexone.htm

[20] Joanna Weschler, "The evolution of Security Council innovations in sanctions," *International Journal*, Winter 2009-2010, http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Evolution%20of%20Sanctions%20-%20Int.%20Journal.pdf

[21] UN Security Council Affairs Division, "2011 Highlights of Security Council Practice," June 2012, p. 1, http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/highlights.pdf

Over two-thirds of the meetings (177) in 2011 dealt with country-specific/regional situations with the remaining one-third (58) concerning thematic and cross-cutting issues. The most frequently discussed agenda items in 2011 were "Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan", "The situation in Libya", … and "The situation in Somalia" … In the meetings dealing with country-specific/regional situations, the regional distribution shows that Africa accounted for 68%3 of the meetings in that category, followed by the Middle East (15%), Asia (7%), Europe (7%) and the Americas (3%).[22]

At its 2011 meetings, the Council adopted 66 resolutions. Of those, "43 were adopted under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations" and therefore pertained to violations of peace and security by particular states. Again, this is an increase from the Cold War era and about average for the last 10 years.[23]

All but three of the 2011 resolutions were adopted unanimously. Five Council members (Brazil, China, Germany, India, and Russia) abstained from a resolution on Libya; one (Lebanon) abstained from a resolution on non-proliferation; and two (China and Russia) abstained from a resolution on peace and security in Africa. In addition, two draft resolutions were vetoed by P-5 members. The US vetoed a text on Palestine, and Russia and China vetoed a draft resolution on the situation in the Middle East.[24]

In its March 2011 resolution on Libya, the Security Council authorized "all necessary means" to protect civilians in Libya. In doing so, it acted on the principle of "The Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) civilians from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and other atrocities even if this means violating national sovereignty. This principle was adopted by the GA in September 2009.[25] From March to October 2011, several members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) assisted Libyan rebels in their fight to depose President Moammar Kadafi. In doing so, they exceeded the Security Council mandate to protect civilians.

Since then, the international consensus behind R2P has weakened,[26] as is evident in the UN's inability to respond to the civil war in Syria. Although the GA condemned the violence in December 2011,[27] the Security Council has been paralyzed and unable to act on the situation due to two actual and other threatened Chinese and Russian vetoes.[28] According to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon,

> we face an urgent test here and now. Words must become deeds. Promise must become practice. You have all seen the horrible images and reports coming out of Syria: aerial bombardments of civilians; mothers weeping, clutching their dead children in their arms. Inaction cannot be an option for our

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[22] UN Security Council Affairs Division, "2011 Highlights of Security Council Practice," p. 2.

[23] UN Security Council Affairs Division, "2011 Highlights of Security Council Practice," pp. 1-2.

[24] UN Security Council Affairs Division, "2011 Highlights of Security Council Practice," pp. 5-6.

[25] "General Assembly agrees to hold more talks on responsibility to protect," UN News Centre, 14 September 2009, http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=32047

[26] Philippe Bolopion, "After Libya, the question: To protect or depose?," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 August 2011, http://articles.latimes.com/2011/aug/25/opinion/la-oe-bolopion-libya-responsibility-t20110825

[27] UN General Assembly, "General Assembly Adopts More Than 60 Resolutions Recommended by Third Committee, Including Text Condemning Grave, Systematic Human Rights Violations in Syria," press release GA/11198, 19 December 2011, http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2011/ga11198.doc.htm

[28] Security Council Report, "Syria," http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/syria/ For the text of the vetoed draft resolutions, scroll to the bottom of Security Council Report, "UN Documents for Syria," http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/syria/

community of nations. We cannot stand by while populations fall victim to these grave crimes and violations. We must uphold the core responsibilities of the United Nations.[29]

Many of the Council's resolutions impose or increase sanctions against states and other actors found to be in violation of Chapter VII of the UN Charter. In 2011, the targets of new or increased sanctions were: the government of Libya (before the fall of Kadafi), the former president of and other individuals in Cote d'Ivoire, individuals and groups associated with al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and individuals and groups recruiting children to fight in Somalia and attacking civilians in Somalia. The Security Council also "expressed its intention" to consider violations of childrens' rights as a basis for new and stricter sanctions against warring parties in other conflicts.[30]

In 2011, the Council also referred the situations in Libya and in Cote d'Ivoire to the International Criminal Court, "established two peacekeeping missions in South Sudan and Abyei and one political mission in Libya, and terminated the peacekeeping mission in the Sudan and the political mission in Nepal. In addition, it modified the mandate of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire by temporarily increasing its strength."[31]

In addition to country-specific actions, the Security Council addresses a number of general issues on a regular basis. Chief among these are nuclear non-proliferation, "women and peace and security," and the security effects of climate change.

The development of nuclear energy programs in many countries raises questions about whether and how the development and use of nuclear weapons can be controlled. The Security Council has been heavily involved in this issue, especially with regard to non-P-5 states that have nuclear programs, such as North Korea and Iran. In September 2009, when the United States held the Security Council presidency, US President Barak Obama chaired a rare Security Council session attended by heads of state. At the meeting, the Council passed Resolution S/RES/1887, which urged states to recommit to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, strengthen nuclear inspections, and secure nuclear materials within the next four years.[32] According to reporter David E. Sanger,

> Mr. Obama accomplished that goal in part by acknowledging that the United States was part of the nuclear problem and would have to accept limits on its own arsenal — steps Mr. Bush always rejected. Mr. Obama committed to winning Senate ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which President Bill Clinton could not get through the Senate, and acknowledged that the United States had an obligation under the treaty to move toward elimination of its own arsenal.[33]

This was an important step by the US because both the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) have stipulations that pertain to states that already have nuclear weapons. According to the NPT, the only legal nuclear weapons states are those that had declared nuclear programs when the Treaty was written in 1968, namely the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China. All other state parties to the Treaty agreed to pursue nuclear programs only for energy, not for weapons. In exchange, the five existing nuclear states promised to "pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to … nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international

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[29] UN Department of Public Information, "Responsibility to Protect Faces Urgent Test 'Here and Now', Secretary-General Tells General Assembly, Stressing Immense Human Cost of Failure in Syria," press release SG/SM/14490 GA/11271, 5 September 2012, http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sgsm14490.doc.htm

[30] UN Security Council Affairs Division, "2011 Highlights of Security Council Practice," pp. 12-13.

[31] UN Security Council Affairs Division, "2011 Highlights of Security Council Practice," pp. 13-14.

[32] United Nations, *Security Council Resolution 1887*, 24 September 2009, http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/523/74/PDF/N0952374.pdf?OpenElement.

[33] David E. Sanger, "Security Council Adopts Nuclear Arms Measure," *New York Times*, 24 September 2009; http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/25/world/25prexy.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=obama%20%22security%20council%22&st=cse.

control."[34] Despite frequent discussions in the United Nations General Assembly, no progress has been made on general and complete nuclear disarmament.

Similarly, although the CTBT was negotiated many years ago, it cannot enter into force unless ratified by 150 countries, including:

> all 44 of the States mentioned in Annex 2 of the Treaty – those which possessed nuclear weapons or nuclear weapons technology at the time it opened for signature in 1996… So far, 35 of these nations, including France, Russia and the United Kingdom, have ratified it, but China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the United States and Iran, among other nations, have not.[35]

In 2000, the Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on "Women and Peace and Security," which called on states to consider all aspects of the relationship between women, peace, and security, from the participation of women in governments, military forces, diplomatic missions, and the UN, to their rape and abuse by soldiers and peacekeeping forces. In 2011, the Council "requested the Secretary-General in his next annual report on resolution 1325 (2000) to include … a comprehensive overview of specific actions, achievements and challenges with regard to the participation of women in mediation and preventive diplomacy." [36]

In April 2007, the Security Council held its first-ever discussion of climate change. The United Kingdom (UK), which held the Council presidency at the time, put the issue on the agenda to "highlight 'what a sensitive, difficult issue' climate change is and the importance of addressing its potential security ramifications -- from rising temperatures increasing water levels and swallowing up island nations to possible famine."[37] Reaction to this meeting was mixed, with some states welcoming Security Council concern and calling for resolutions on the matter, and other states arguing that climate change was not a traditional security issue and should continue to be dealt with by the full-membership GA instead of by the limited-membership Security Council.

In 2011, the Council issued its first official text on climate change – a presidential statement expressing concern that "possible adverse effects of climate change may, in the long run, aggravate certain existing threats to international peace and security and that the loss of territory of some States caused by sea-level rise, particularly in small low-lying island States, could have possible security implications." [38] A presidential statement is a way for the Council to express a position when member states disagree too strongly to pass a resolution or when they are monitoring an ongoing situation.

In 2012, the Council has focused on security concerns in the Middle East. Although it has been stymied on the situation in Syria, it was able to pass Resolution 2064, which extends the Interim Force separating Lebanon and Israel for another year and calls for Israel to withdraw from the Ghajar regions of Lebanon.[39]

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[34] "Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)," 1968, Articles II, IV, VI, http://www.un.org/events/npt2005/npttreaty.html.

[35] "Ratification of UN-backed nuclear treaty nears milestone of 150 countries," UN News Centre, 19 August 2009, http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=31809&Cr=Nuclear&Cr1=.

[36] UN Security Council Affairs Division, "2011 Highlights of Security Council Practice," p. 15.

[37] "UN to Discuss Climate as Security Issue," *Associated Press*, April 5, 2007, http://www.globalpolicy.org/socecon/envronmt/climate/2007/0405climatesecurity.htm

[38] UN Security Council Affairs Division, "2011 Highlights of Security Council Practice," pp. 15-16.

[39] United Nations Security Council, "Resolutions: 2012" http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/unsc_resolutions12.htm

Agenda Topics for the MMUN Conference

At the 2012 Montana Model United Nations Conference, the Security Council will address the following three topics:

1. Threats to Security Caused by Terrorist Acts (with emphasis on Yemen)
2. The Situation in North Korea
3. Peacebuilding (with emphasis on Haiti)

When writing your position papers and resolutions, think broadly about these issues, remembering the overarching goals of the United Nations and the Security Council, as well as the perspective of the country you represent.

Recommended Reading

Annan, Kofi. "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security, and Human Rights for All." Report of the Secretary General. 21 March 2005. Available at http://www.un.org/largerfreedom/.

This report by the former secretary general summarizes some of the problems of the Security Council, as well as many of the contemporary issues related to disarmament, peace, and security.

"The Charter of the United Nations." Available online at http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/.

This charter founded the United Nations and serves as its basis for procedure and authority. It is vital for delegates to be familiar with Chapters V, VI, VII, and VIII, which pertain to the Security Council.

"Security Council Report." Website. Available at http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/ .

This Columbia University web site monitors Security Council actions and resolutions. It is an excellent source for information on the Council's recent activities and challenges, as well as monthly predictions.

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). "Armed Conflicts and Conflict Management" and "Arms Control and Disarmament Documentary Survey." Website. Available at http://www.sipri.org/.

SIPRI provides information on the number, types, and locations of contemporary wars; the military forces, expenditures, and agreements of various states; the status of various arms control treaties; and contemporary security challenges. It is an excellent resource for learning about many vital issues in peace and security.

"UN News Centre." Available online at http://www.un.org/News/.

This site will help you keep up with the unfolding events in Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and other current conflicts, as well as Security Council briefings and actions.

"UN Security Council." Website. Available at http://www.un.org/Docs/sc.

This is the official website for the Security Council. It offers a wealth of information on the Council's current and past activities, including reports, resolutions, and verbatim meeting records in which you can learn your country's position on a variety of issues.