



Southern China International MUN

Official Background Guide

United Nations Security Council (UNSC): Promoting the safeguarding of civilians in armed conflicts in the Middle East through International Protection and Security

Agenda overseen by Wilson Yao

1. Description of the Issue



Figure 1: Civilians fleeing Mosul, Syria in 2016

1.1 History of Issue

The **Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA)** region has been in decades of warfare which had led to tens of thousands of casualties since the beginning of the **Arab Spring** in 2011. The ongoing wars in the MENA region, which includes the **Syrian Civil War**, the **Second Libyan Civil War** and acts of terrorism across the region, has been severely threatening the safeguard of civilians in the Middle East.

Looking back into history, the MENA region has never been a profoundly peaceful land on Earth. The **Levant** region, which roughly includes Syria, Jordan, Israel and Lebanon today, is the origin of three major religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. These three religions have been in conflict in the MENA region since one of the most iconic events in history – the **Crusades** from 1096 to 1291. The Crusades were launched by Christians in Europe, as they believed in the ideology of taking back the “holy land” from heretic Muslims. Throughout the

200 years, the Crusades had taken tens of thousands of lives from Europe, and farmers and merchants joined the war voluntarily.

During World War I, the Ottoman Empire was the dominant power in the region. However, the aftermath of the war since the Battle of Gallipoli have devastated the Ottoman Empire, with Western powers such as Great Britain and France splitting the resources in the region. In 1916, Hussein Ben Ali and a British military officer Thomas Lawrence (later known as Lawrence of Arabia), united to overthrow the Ottoman empire's regime in the Levant and the Arab World. However, the French, the British and the Russians had privately signed the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which included Syria under French rule. The agreement also partitioned Syria from its southern parts, which evolved into modern-day Iraq.⁷

The simple partition of the Levant region is one of the major causes of civil wars and international conflicts, as a border drawn by foreign powers without regards to culture and ethnicity.



Figure 2: The Sykes-Picot Agreement Map

Syria and Iraq gained independence respectively in 1946 and 1958, after decades of foreign colonial rule. In the coming decades, the discovery of oil in the region had once again made countries in the Levant a hotspot for global interests and conflicts.²

Since 2011, approximately 400,000 people had died from the ongoing civil war in Syria; in these casualties, 14,022 people died of US airstrikes, with 3,833 being civilians. With terrorist organizations, local regimes, opposition forces and international intervention, the situation in the Middle East is highly complex and interconnected. With religion conflicts as a background and fossil fuel supplies as a significant stake, world powers come to the Middle East in a contest of maximizing their interests at the expense of the local civilians.¹¹

1.2 Recent Developments

Case Study 1: The White Helmets

Officially known as **Syria Civil Defense (SCD)**, the **White Helmets** were found in 2014 by James Le Mesurier to provide civilian protection, rescue and evacuation in the region. Even though the White Helmets is a civilian-based organization operating in war zones, the group

has grown to be having more than 3,000 volunteers operating from 111 centres in Syria as of 2016.⁵



Figure 3: White Helmets Members in a Rescue Operation

The White Helmets has been grabbing the international society's attention that a civilian organization composed of volunteers can make an impact on civilian protection in combat zones. According to a Time report, local civil-defence groups "went to work filling the vacuum left by the regime: reconnecting electricity and water, assessing medical needs, disposing of the dead. It was a humanitarian experiment in revolutionary self-organization—the skeleton of an alternate government establishing itself across much of Syria as the war dragged on from months to years, a shared enterprise that convened -disparate opposition groups and demonstrated that, absent Assad, Syrians could govern themselves."⁶

While contributing to the humanitarian aid, rescue and infrastructure rebuild projects, the White Helmets organization is also under fire from several countries including China and Russia, claiming that the organization had fake publicity campaigns and "taken sides" in the Syrian Civil war. A report from Chinese state media claimed that the SCD had faked video footage depicting one of their rescue operations. Other accusations from the Assad regime in Syria accuses SCD members being "Al Qaeda members". On November 11, 2019, the founder of the White Helmets, James Le Mesurier was found dead in the streets near his residence. Despite the controversies and deaths of members, the organization is still functioning today.

The story of the White Helmets indicates a successful model of civilian-organized groups that are capable of performing civilian safeguarding with the help of international support. Even though not all countries agree with this practice, it is a noteworthy example of how local resources can be utilized for safeguarding civilians on a massive scale.

Case Study 2: The Kurds

The Kurdish people, which resides across the border regions of **Turkey, Syria, Iraq** and **Iran**, remain the largest ethnic group in the world that does not yet have their own ethnic nation. The Kurds have been fighting governments in the region since long to form their own ethnic nation---**Kurdistan**. Despite their "stateless" situation, the Kurds have been a major contributor to anti-terrorism efforts in the Middle East. According to Vox, the Kurdish people have maintained order in the region and established prisons to hold ISIS captives. Despite

their initial success, their ally, the United States, under President Trump's administration, retrieved from the region and left the Kurds to confront the Turkish forces entering the region.

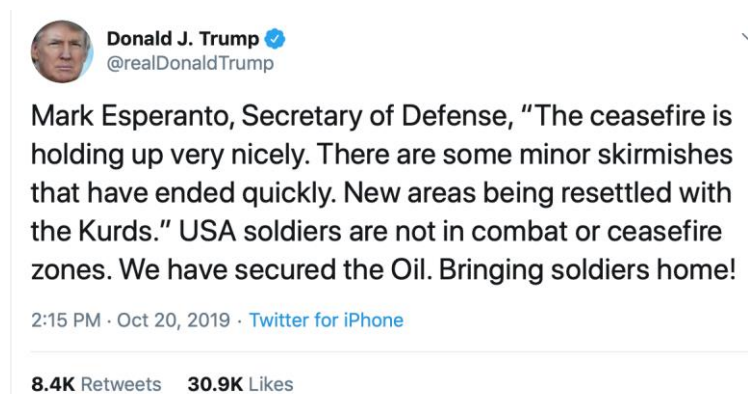


Figure 4: President Trump's Tweet on Retreating Troops from Kurdistan

Once US forces are out of Syrian Kurdistan, the Kurds will need to be readjusting their military arrangements to confront the Turkish military, leaving towns and routes inland unguarded, which could again damage the civilian safeguarding situation in Kurdistan.

The Kurds Case Study shows how foreign superpowers in the region can alter the situation in a region rapidly, leaving great shoes to fill and could possibly endanger civilians in the way.

2. Emphasis of the Discourse

2.1 Right Wing Approach

Conservatively speaking, a right-wing approach to the issue would be focused on eliminating terrorism and opposition military forces that are threatening the safety of civilians in the region. Countries that are holding a right-wing attitude on this issue would be **Russia, China, Venezuela** and their allies.

1. Providing essential training and material support to local government forces to protect civilians
2. Preserving the current government structures and territories of MENA countries, with lifting sanctions and aids to support their governance
3. Restore, rebuild and invest in infrastructures that are crucial to the MENA peace progress, such as transport, security, communications and healthcare
4. Being against sending further military intervention forces, especially ground forces to intervene in conflicts in the Middle East directly

2.2. Left Wing Approach

The left-wing approach on this topic would be focusing on supporting the democratic transition process of the Middle East in order to build more democratic governments that are able to reunite the MENA region. Countries that would support the liberal approach could include **European Union countries** and countries that have a strong liberal bend in their foreign policies.

For left-wing politicians, the solutions to this topic can include:

1. Aiding in ethnic groups and their military forces such as the Kurds under the principle of self-determination from the UN Charter, and fund organizations such as the White

Helmets for them to fight against terrorism and to provide civil defence services in the MENA region

2. Placing sanctions or other forms of punishment to authoritarian governments in the Middle East, ensuring that they do not violate human rights and civilian safety
3. Using the resources of the UN to push forward the democratization of the Middle East that has been ongoing since the Arab Spring
4. Sending peacekeeping forces or other types of military forces, if necessary, to carry out civilian protection missions in the MENA region

2.3 Noteworthy Situations of Major Regional Stakeholders

Turkey:

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the incumbent president of Turkey, has repeatedly mentioned the establishment of a "safe zone" in Syria. Since October 2019, the Turkish military has been ordered to invade the border regions of Syria near Turkey, to execute Erdogan's plan of creating the "safe zone". Erdogan believed that by relocating Syrian refugees to this "safe zone" under Turkish occupation, the process of returning refugees back to Syria could begin.¹⁰

Turkish military forces were also dispatched to intervene in the Libyan civil war under Erdogan's administration. Signing memorandums of understanding between Turkey and the **Government of National Accord (GNA)** which controls the Libyan capital Tripoli and is backed by western countries, Erdogan claimed that Turkey intervention is "to support the legitimate government and avoid a humanitarian tragedy".¹⁰

As Turkey becomes gradually inclined to use its military and political force to intervene in MENA affairs, Turkey poses as a significant stakeholder in this issue as it will have to seek balance between using its military might to expand influence in the region but also comply to UN standards for protecting civilians which may delay Turkey's expansion of influence.²

Iran:

On January 3, 2020, one of the most high-ranked military commanders of Iran, general **Qasem Soleimani** was killed in Baghdad, Iraq by a US drone airstrike. The assassination of general Soleimani was strongly protested by the Iranian government and the supreme leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, had pledged for revenge. Iran then launched missiles against US bases several days later as a retaliation measure. Tensions between Iran and the United States then rose to an all-time high, which was then slightly relived after the US revealed that no casualties were recorded from the Iran strike.³

With this standoff between the two countries, the risk of all-out modern warfare between two strong powers has increased in the Middle East. Iran, with its Shia Muslim believes, could be a strong centrifugal force for the Middle East as it seeks to reshuffle the current Middle East order to create a safer and more independent strategical situation for itself.⁷ In the hypothetical scenario of a US-Iran war, massive amounts of resources could be diverted to the war, and this would leave power vacuums in unattended regions in the Middle East which could be a hotbed for terrorist organizations such as ISIS to rise up again, further complicating the issue of safeguarding civilians.

Saudi Arabia:

Saudi Arabia, with its human rights records widely criticized by the western world after the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, is still “in the game” for civilian protection in the MENA region. Representing the Sunni Muslim world, Saudi Arabia is a strong centripetal force for conservatism and Sunni Muslims in the Middle East, as Saudi Arabia's major ideologies are to maintain the status quo of the Middle East, with buffer zones such as Iraq to form barriers with Iran.⁷

2.4 Stance of Intergovernmental Organizations

Intergovernmental organizations, or **IGOs**, are organizations composed mainly of sovereign countries as its member states, sometimes also composed of other intergovernmental organizations. The difference between IGOs and **Non-Government Organizations (NGOs)** is that NGOs are operated independent apart from governments, i.e. the United Nations is an IGO, while Greenpeace, an environment activist organization is an NGO.

As of January 2020, the United Nations Security Council have **unanimously passed** the following noteworthy resolutions on situations in the Syrian Civil War:

Notable UNSC Resolutions on the Syrian Civil War ⁹		
Nr.	Date	Content Summary
2401	24 Feb 2018	Nationwide ceasefire in Syria for 30 days
2336	31 Dec 2016	Allow humanitarian agencies to pass through war zones safe and rapidly
2328	19 Dec 2016	Demanding immediate and unhindered access for observation of monitoring civilian evacuations from Aleppo, Syria
2209	26 Feb 2016	Calling for a cessation of hostilities and a grant for access to humanitarian workers in Syria
2254	18 Dec 2015	Ceasefire

From the table above, it is clear that the UNSC member states can form a consensus on ceasefires and humanitarian aid. In addition, the Secretary-General of the UN, Antonio Guterres, said in September 2019 in Geneva: “I strongly believe that the launch of the Syrian-owned and Syrian-led Constitutional Committee can and must be the beginning of the political path out of the tragedy towards a solution, in line with resolution 2254, that meets the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians and is based on a strong commitment to the country’s sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity...”⁸

The stance of the UN as an IGO can be thus considered to be more inclined towards stability and reconstruction based on self-determination, which corresponds to the UN Charter. Similar attitudes should be applied to other conflicts in the Middle East such as the Libyan Civil war, as the UN’s mission in the region remains unchanged: the maintenance of international peace and security.

2.5 Stance of More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs)

For MEDCs, especially the permanent members of the UNSC (China, France, UK, United States and Russia), their fundamental interest remains the same: To maximize their economic and political interests in the Middle East region to secure their economic growth and boost

their national security. As the international oil price directly affects the industrial output and economic indexes, P5 countries and other MEDCs that are highly reliant on fossil fuel economy will all be taking their different approaches to try and optimize their interests through ways such as but not limited to military intervention, sanctions and aids.

MEDCs will be generally in favour of seeing these situations to happen:

1. Civilian protection is achieved in an economical and efficient way in the Middle East
2. The current refugee crisis does not escalate with new solutions implemented
3. The MENA region gradually stabilizes with sides forming long-term confrontation such as ceasefire agreements or partitions

2.6 Stance of Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs)

For LEDCs, especially those in the MENA region such as Lebanon, Iran and Turkey, would be more focused on seeking to maintain their political stability and sovereignty, then seeking for outside help to eventually end conflicts in the MENA region and solve the issue on a long-term basis. Using Lebanon as an example, with 1.5 million refugees currently in the country, Lebanon would be more interested in seeing that the country's internal needs being dealt with first than to spend more resources externally.

LEDCs will be generally in favour of seeing these situations to happen:

1. Current regimes being preserved in the Middle East peace process
2. Funding aids and direct support from the international society to rebuild infrastructure
3. Military intervention from countries given that sovereignty will not be infringed

3. Possible Solutions

3.1 In Favor of MEDCs

As previously mentioned MEDCs will be willing to see solutions that address their interests more accurately and comprehensively. Thus, actions that can be taken by the UNSC include:

1. Actions were taken against governments or organizations that severely threaten civilian protection and/or land and maritime oil trading routes, aviation routes, etc.
2. Funding training programs and infrastructure rebuild investment programs that aim to reconstruct the Middle East after decades of warfare
3. Acts of aggression between nations in the Middle East come to an end under UN mediation, all countries in the MENA region comply with international treaties and UN resolutions

3.2 In Favor of LEDCs

As LEDCs seek a more rapid way in securing their sovereignty and recovering from the war, solutions that would be supported by LEDCs include:

1. Military actions were taken by governments to eliminate terrorist threat and opposition groups
2. MEDCs provide funding and resources to upgrade the military and national security abilities of LEDCs

3. MEDCs make investment and provide aid for the reconstruction of infrastructure, in order for the region to stabilize

4. Keep in Mind the Following

It is highly recommended to watch these videos on Youtube by Vox Media to increase understanding of the situation in the MENA region.

(Videos are very well animated and explains the issue in plain language)

The Middle East's cold war, explained	https://bit.ly/38E7hxxh
Why Turkey is invading Syria	https://bit.ly/38LjPD9
Syria's war: Who is fighting and why	https://bit.ly/2t5E3Z6

In the meantime, try to bear in mind the following questions when conducting research and organizing your thoughts:

1. What is the essence of the Middle East's long-winding conflicts?
2. What specific interests does this country have in the MENA region?
3. Which superpowers are supporting who?

5. Evaluation

The safeguarding of civilians in armed conflicts in the Middle East tackles with fundamental issues that had been troubling the MENA region since long ago, and to truly solve the issue, a comprehensive solution that considers both history and the future must be created. It is expected to see strong opposition in country blocs; the member states must find a consensus based on international law and division of interests to truly reach a resolution that would benefit civilians in the region.

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