

U N S C



NMMUN '25



BACKGROUND
GUIDE

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ABOUT THE COUNCIL

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) stands as the principal organ of the United Nations entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security. Established in 1945, its primary objective is to prevent conflict, foster diplomatic solutions, and uphold the principles of the UN Charter through binding resolutions and peacekeeping mandates.

Comprising 15 member states, including five permanent members (United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China) and ten non-permanent members elected for two-year terms, the Council brings together nations representing diverse political, economic, and regional perspectives. Its structure ensures both continuity and rotation in addressing the world's most pressing security challenges.

At NMMUN 2025, the UNSC seeks to emulate this real-world diplomatic environment by providing delegates the opportunity to engage with two globally significant agendas — Reforming the United Nations Security Council and The South China Sea Disputes. Through this simulation, participants will explore questions of institutional legitimacy, regional representation, and the evolving dynamics of international law and maritime security.

The UNSC at NMMUN ensures that all debates adhere to rigorous standards of diplomacy, cooperation, and realism. Delegates will be expected to uphold the values of negotiation, respect for sovereignty, and commitment to peaceful conflict resolution while adapting to the fast-paced and often unpredictable nature of Security Council proceedings.

Through its global relevance and intellectual rigor, the UNSC remains one of the most prestigious and challenging committees at NMMUN, serving as a platform for young diplomats to engage critically with international crises and contribute innovative solutions that mirror the complexities of real-world policymaking.

Letter From The Chair

Greetings delegates,

I, Roven Roy, welcome you to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) at NMMUN'25. This year, the council will focus upon two pivotal agendas — UNSC Reform and the South China Sea Disputes; both of which challenge the balance between law, legitimacy, and power in global governance.

The first agenda, Reforming the UNSC, strikes at the very heart of international decision-making. Since 1945, the Council's composition has remained largely unchanged, even as the geopolitical landscape has transformed dramatically. Calls for reform from the G4 nations; India, Japan, Brazil, and Germany, have intensified, demanding a council that reflects modern realities rather than post-war hierarchies. Meanwhile, nations like South Africa, Ukraine, and North Korea bring diverse regional perspectives that will push the debate on representation, veto power, and accountability.

Our second agenda, the South China Sea Dispute, lies at the intersection of international law, regional stability, and global commerce. The area's strategic importance is undeniable — it serves as a critical artery for world trade, sustains millions through its fisheries, and holds vital energy reserves. The dispute involves overlapping claims and tensions among China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and key external stakeholders such as the United States, Japan, and India. Delegates must navigate a complex environment where legal frameworks meet the hard realities of state sovereignty, regional power projection, and security dilemmas.

Across both agendas, I encourage you to think beyond traditional diplomacy — to innovate, question, and strategize. Whether reforming global institutions or resolving maritime conflicts, your challenge will be to balance principle with pragmatism, legality with legitimacy, and national interest with collective peace.

I look forward to intense debate, sharp diplomacy, and creative resolutions that reflect the spirit of this council.

Best wishes for your preparation,

Roven Roy

Chair, United Nations Security Council

NMMUN 2025

Agenda 1: UNSC Reform

Background

The UN Security Council (UNSC) was established in 1945 under the UN Charter to maintain international peace and security. It has 15 members: 5 permanent (P5) with veto power (China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US), and 10 non-permanent elected members serving 2-year terms.

While effective at times, the Council faces criticism:

- It reflects 1945 power structures, not today's multipolar world.
- Africa, Latin America, and much of Asia lack permanent representation.
- The veto power often leads to deadlock on urgent crises (Syria, Ukraine, Gaza, etc.).
- Calls for democratization and accountability have intensified.

Reform debates focus on expansion of membership, limitations on the veto, and regional representation, but legal and political hurdles remain immense.

Timeline of Key Developments

- 1945 — UN Charter creates UNSC with 11 members (5 permanent + 6 non-permanent).
- 1963 — GA Resolution 1991 expands non-permanent seats from 6 to 10 (total 15 members, in effect 1965).
- 1993 — GA Resolution 48/26 establishes the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on Council Reform.
- 2005 — World Summit debates expansion; G4 (Brazil, Germany, India, Japan) and AU (Ezulwini Consensus) present competing proposals. No consensus.
- 2009 — Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) launched in GA to advance reform talks.
- 2015 — GA adopts a negotiating text for UNSC reform for the first time, but progress stalls.
- 2023–24 — Growing frustration with UNSC inaction (Ukraine war, Middle East crises) renews calls for reform, including from P5 members themselves (e.g., US, France, UK express openness to expansion).

Issues at Hand

1. Representation & Legitimacy

- Emerging powers (India, Brazil, Japan, Germany) demand permanent seats.
- Africa insists on permanent representation given it makes up ~28% of UN membership.
- Latin America and the Arab world also seek stronger voices.

2. The Veto Power

- Critics argue it undermines democracy and enables paralysis.
- Some propose restricting its use in cases of genocide/war crimes.
- Others argue eliminating it is politically impossible since P5 would block it.

3. Size & Efficiency

- Expansion risks making the Council unwieldy and slow.
- Balance between inclusivity and effectiveness is unresolved.

4. Equity in Regional Distribution

- Current seats skew heavily toward Europe.
- Under-representation of Africa, Latin America, and South Asia is a central complaint.

Countries Involved

- P5 (United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, China):
 - Seek to preserve their veto power and current privileges within the Council. Often emphasize stability, precedent, and maintaining the post-World War II international order.
- G4 Nations (India, Japan, Brazil, Germany):
 - Advocate for permanent membership expansion to reflect contemporary geopolitical realities. Represent major regional and economic powers seeking greater influence in global governance.
- African Representation (South Africa):
 - Echoes the broader African Union demand for at least two permanent and five non-permanent seats for Africa, emphasizing regional equity and historical underrepresentation.
- Emerging Powers and Regional Voices (Ukraine, North Korea):
 - Provide distinct perspectives from Eastern Europe and the Korean Peninsula. Ukraine highlights accountability, transparency, and limits on veto misuse, while North Korea brings an alternative, security-focused approach to international stability and sovereignty.

Past UN Involvement

- 1.1965 Reform: First and only successful structural change to UNSC membership (from 11 → 15).
 - 2.1993 OEWG: Established formal process for reform discussions.
 - 3.2005 World Summit: Failed to adopt any proposal; divisions between G4, AU, and UfC stalled consensus.
 - 4.2009 IGN: Created as a continuous GA platform for negotiations; still ongoing annually, but with no breakthrough.
 - 5.2015 Negotiating Text: First consolidated document to guide talks, though no consensus on substance.
- Ongoing GA Debates: Annual debates reaffirm “urgent need for reform” but stall over P5 consent and regional rivalries.

Possible Solutions

- 1.Expansion of Membership
 - Add new permanent seats (with or without veto) for G4 + Africa.
 - Expand non-permanent category to improve regional representation.
- 2.Veto Reform
 - Limit veto use in cases of genocide, war crimes, or mass atrocities.
 - Require 2+ P5 members to exercise a veto (not unilateral).
- 3.Regional Representation
 - Guarantee seats for Africa, Latin America, and Middle East.
 - Rotate regional permanent seats.
- 4.Transparency and Accountability
 - Make UNSC more open to General Assembly oversight.
 - Increase consultation with regional organizations.
- 5.Intermediate Model
 - Create long-term renewable seats (8–10 years) as a compromise before full permanent expansion.

Reforming the UNSC remains one of the UN’s toughest challenges. While consensus exists that reform is necessary, sharp divisions over who gets power and how veto is used block progress. The debate reflects the struggle between preserving the privileges of 1945 and adapting to the realities of the 21st century.

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Agenda 2: South China Sea Dispute

Introduction

The South China Sea dispute is fundamentally about competing sovereignty claims over land features and corresponding maritime entitlements — territorial seas, exclusive economic zones (EEZs), and continental shelves together with rights to fisheries and seabed resources. The legal starting point is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which sets out how coastal states may claim maritime zones and how disputes should be resolved. Complicating the legal picture are competing historical claims, such as China's nine-dash line, and differing interpretations of maritime entitlements around low-tide elevations, rocks, and artificial islands. States also pursue practical strategies — including occupation, artificial island construction, and resource exploration — to advance or entrench claims. Economically, the South China Sea supports vital fisheries and is a conduit for international trade; strategically, control of the Sea affects military positioning and power projection. In the UNSC, this topic raises questions about the role of international law, the enforcement mechanisms available to the UN system, and how to prevent disputes between states from transforming into larger conflicts. Consider both legal and diplomatic tools — arbitration, bilateral negotiations, confidence-building measures, and multilateral frameworks aimed at de-escalation and cooperative resource management.

Historical Background

*The South China Sea's contested history is long and layered. Colonial-era mapping, shifting post-World War II settlements, and the rise of nation-states all contributed to overlapping claims. In 1947 the ROC map drew early demarcations later adapted into what is now referred to as the nine-dash line. During the Cold War, most claimants focused on establishing control over proximate features, punctuated by occasional clashes such as China's seizure of the Paracels in 1974 and confrontations in the Spratlys in 1988. Post-Cold War, growing competition for resources and strategic advantage intensified disputes. The 1992 and subsequent domestic laws of coastal states asserted maritime claims; meanwhile, rising naval capabilities and civilian maritime assets increased the potential for incidents. A landmark legal moment came with the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration decision in *Philippines v. China*, which rejected China's historical claims under the nine-dash line. China, however, rejected the tribunal's jurisdiction and did not comply with the award, illustrating enforcement limits with international law. This historical trajectory highlights three persistent tensions: reconciling historical narratives with modern legal frameworks, balancing resource access with environmental protection, and avoiding strategic escalation in a region with many overlapping interests.*

Case Studies

Several cases demonstrate both legal avenues and geopolitical complexities:

1. *Philippines v. China (2013–2016)*: The Philippines sought arbitration under UNCLOS. The PCA ruled significantly in favor of the Philippines, finding that China's nine-dash line had no legal basis for maritime entitlements. Despite the ruling, China rejected the award and continued operations and construction, underlining the gap between legal rulings and political compliance.
2. *Vietnam–China Resource Disputes*: Vietnam's attempts to develop offshore energy resources have led to recurring confrontations with Chinese vessels, including harassment of exploration ships and maritime militia presence. These incidents underscore risks to civilian economic activity and regional stability.
3. *Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs)*: The United States and partners regularly operate in the area to challenge excessive maritime claims and uphold navigational rights. While legally grounded in principles of freedom of navigation, FONOPs can increase tensions and risk close encounters with claimants' coast guards and navies.
4. *ASEAN Diplomacy and the Code of Conduct*: ASEAN has sought a Code of Conduct with China for decades. Progress has been slow due to differing priorities among ASEAN members, some of whom prioritize economic ties with China and prefer a non-confrontational approach.
5. *Taiwan's Role*: Taiwan maintains de facto control over Taiping Island and operates military outposts, but its limited diplomatic recognition and exclusion from some multilateral forums complicate comprehensive conflict-management efforts.

Steps Taken

Responding to recurring tensions, states and organizations have pursued several measures:

- Diplomatic frameworks: ASEAN and China signed the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, calling for restraint and peaceful resolution. Negotiations for a binding Code of Conduct continue, aiming to reduce incidents and manage disputes.
- Legal actions: States have used UNCLOS dispute-settlement mechanisms (notably the 2016 PCA award) to seek legal clarity. While judicial avenues can clarify legal entitlements, their impact depends on political willingness to comply.
- Operational measures: States have established hotlines, conducted joint exercises with partners, and pursued coast guard cooperation to manage incidents at sea and avoid escalation. Confidence-building and resource cooperation: Proposals for joint resource development, fisheries management agreements, and environmental protection initiatives have been discussed as pragmatic ways to share benefits while postponing sovereignty disputes.

Despite these steps, the dispute remains unresolved. Progress requires stronger regional mechanisms, clearer communication channels, and creative incentives for cooperation that align political interests with legal and economic benefits.

Areas Of Improvement

1. Strengthen mechanisms for implementing international rulings and enhance transparency in state practice.
2. Prioritize joint resource development to provide immediate economic benefits and reduce incentives for unilateral actions.
3. Build robust crisis communication channels / hotlines between claimant states and external naval actors.
4. Support ASEAN capacity-building so the bloc can negotiate more cohesively.
5. Encourage environmental protections and sustainable fisheries management in disputed waters.

Suggested Moderated And Unmoderated Topics

1. The role and limits of UNCLOS in dispute resolution.
2. Prospects and design of an ASEAN–China Code of Conduct.
3. How freedom of navigation operations affect regional stability.
4. Designing joint resource development agreements that protect sovereignty claims while sharing benefits.

Unmoderated Topics:

1. Drafting de-escalation and incident-at-sea protocols.
2. Negotiating fisheries co-management and environmental safeguards.
3. Exploring multilateral verification mechanisms for resource development.

Guiding Questions

1. How can the UNSC promote measures that prevent escalation without undermining regional agency (e.g., ASEAN-led initiatives)?
2. Should the UNSC endorse legal arbitration outcomes, and if so, what enforcement tools are realistic?
3. Can joint resource management be a practical interim solution, and what safeguards must it include?
4. What confidence-building measures would be most effective to reduce maritime incidents?
5. How should the international community balance freedom of navigation and claimant states' economic rights?

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