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For each topic area, Representatives should consider the following questions. These questions should assist Representatives in gaining a better understanding of the issues at hand, particularly from your country's perspective:

- How did this conflict begin? Is this a new conflict or a re-ignition of a previous conflict?
- How have similar situations and conflicts been peacefully resolved?
- What State and regional actors are involved in this conflict?
- If there are non-State actors involved in a conflict, are there any States supporting them? If so, which ones?

The Contemporary Security Council topics below are current as of Spring 2015 and are not all-inclusive of what the Council might talk about at Conference. With the ever-changing nature of international peace and security, these topics are a guide to help direct your research for your State's position. A more complete and updated version of likely topics for the Contemporary Security Council will be posted online in September at www.amun.org.

THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In 2011, civilians in the Syrian Arab Republic began protesting the government of long-reigning President Bashar al-Assad; these protests quickly escalated to armed rebellion, and fighting continues to date. The violence included chemical weapon attacks on the civilian population, which the United Nations condemned and worked to stop through inspections and sanctions. This uproar also spread into neighboring Iraq when Sunni militant extremists began coordinated attacks against the Shia civilian population in July, 2014. The self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS), known also as both the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), has used the instability created by regional conflicts to conquer territory in western Iraq and eastern Syria, declaring itself a caliphate and claiming exclusive political and ideological authority over the world's Muslim population.

IS has been characterized by continual violence, including the beheadings of Western hostages and the mass execution of civilians in the country, which UN investigators are calling genocide. These provocative acts and mass violence against local civilians prompted the United States and other States to look for ways to stem the advance of IS through the Middle East. On 21 September 2014, the United States, with the help of regional partners, began air strikes to help stop the flow of IS aggression. By April 2015, Iraqi forces had gained ground against IS by liberating Tikrit, and Iraqi military commanders were focused on pushing "[IS] militants out of the country and into Syria by the end of the year."

While IS has been losing ground in Iraq and northeastern Syria, IS militants have been seizing new territory in Syria, including along the Syrian-Jordanian border and in the Yarmouk District on the southern edge of the Syrian capital, Damascus. This border-crossing incident has

led to new tensions between Jordan and Syria after Syrian airstrikes hit near the border. IS also succeeded in seizing a Palestinian refugee camp in Damascus in early April 2015, with reports of killings and beheadings spurring United Nations officials to call for quick action to prevent an impending catastrophe and for industrialized States to take in hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees. Additionally, new reports of chemical weapons being used in Syria has angered many countries, calling for renewed United Nations efforts to force compliance on inspections and the removal of all sarin gas and chlorine barrel bombs.

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THE SITUATION IN UKRAINE

The recent unrest in Ukraine began in 2013 when Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, under pressure from the Russian government, rejected a trade deal with the European Union. The ensuing anti-government



protests turned violent in November when government forces attacked protesters, injuring dozens. The conflict continued for several months, with President Yanukovich fleeing to Russia in February 2014, leading to his dismissal by the Ukrainian Parliament. May 2014 elections brought Petro Poroshenko to power, a result greeted warmly by Western States. President Poroshenko quickly moved to reassert government control over restive regions in eastern Ukraine, which were in favor of realignment with Russia. In September 2014, the Ukrainian Parliament granted greater autonomy to separatist regions in eastern Ukraine. On 16 September 2014, the Ukrainian Parliament unanimously supported the decision to join the European Union, a decision which had sparked the original crisis. A tenuous cease-fire held until the Ukrainian Parliament revoked the status of the autonomous regions after they held their own elections in direct violation of the Ukrainian Constitution.

The crisis took on an international focus when armed and uniformed gunmen began seizing government buildings in Crimea. Rallies erupted calling for Crimea to secede from Ukraine and rejoin the Russian Federation; this was overwhelmingly supported in a March 2014 referendum. The Security Council discussed a draft Resolution to declare the election invalid, but Russia vetoed the Resolution. After the inability of the United Nations to act, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) became involved in the Ukraine. Initially brought in to monitor human rights violations, the OSCE has become entrusted to monitor cease-fire violations, oversee the pull-back of weapons from the front lines and to eventually disarm fighters. OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier has stated that an increase in the number of drones and radar systems would help enforce the cease-fire in the eastern part of the country. However, OSCE monitors have been denied access to certain areas of the country to monitor troop withdrawals. While the cease-fire is currently in effect, it has been seen as tenuous. Nonetheless, OSCE monitors have said it means a “good chance for peace” while it holds back the violence.

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THE SITUATION IN THE SUDAN AND SOUTH SUDAN

Despite the end of the Sudanese Civil War in 2005, hostility and fighting continues with conflicts taking place in South Sudan, Darfur and

the oil-rich Abyei region. The Darfur region has been fraught with violence for more than a decade, with dozens of parties clashing over political control, sovereignty, and land and water rights. Weapons have flooded Darfur; ethnic cleansing, systematic rape and the deaths of thousands have plagued the region. Today, Darfur remains in a state of humanitarian and security crisis, with little to no progress toward ending the conflict. The United Nations estimates that around 450,000 people were displaced due to the violence in 2014 alone, placing the total number of displaced peoples at close to 2.5 million since the start of the Civil War.

Relations between the north and south regions of Sudan were still tenuous following the end of the Civil War, with continued clashes over ethnic differences and land disputes. Although South Sudan seceded in 2011, the violence did not cease once they were recognized as an independent State and granted United Nations Member status. The South Sudanese government continues to struggle to put an end to violence within its borders, despite ongoing civil war between the majority ethnic group, the Dinka, and the minority ethnic group, the Nuer. The Nuer and a number of minority political parties were left out of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between Sudan and South Sudan in 2005. The United Nations has laid out plans to impose sanctions against South Sudan in a Security Council Resolution in an attempt to spur a peaceful resolution to the ongoing Civil War. South Sudan President Salva Kiir has dismissed these ultimatums and reiterated his willingness to continue battling the minority protesters.

In addition to the ethnic conflicts in South Sudan, territorial claims over the oil-rich Abyei region remain, with both Sudan and South Sudan retaining armed forces in the district to protect their interests. Abyei has seen four attacks since January 2015, with hostility rising between the region's majority and minority ethnic groups. The Security Council extended the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) through 15 July, urging Sudan and South Sudan to resolve the border dispute immediately and implement a joint security solution for the region.

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