

Simulation from Climate & Energy and International Institutions & Global Governance

Global Climate Change Policy (UNSC)

A major summit approaches where the UN Security Council will meet to discuss the effects of climate change on security.

Case Overview

Fictional, set in the present day. Developed countries have been releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. In recent decades, rapid economic growth in major developing countries such as China, India, and Brazil have led to significant increases in their own greenhouse gas emissions. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and other organizations and governments have concluded that the warming observed in recent decades is a consequence of human activity. The effects of this global warming or climate change pose risks not only to the environment, but also to the security and livelihoods of people around the world, both now and in the future. Various international responses are possible, but the questions of how to cut emissions and prepare for climate consequences, and who should bear the costs of doing so, have few simple answers. UN Security Council members will need to weigh the options, bearing in mind the potential impact of climate change, the potential effects of proposed measures to limit or prevent it, and the need to secure international support for the multilateral approach from both developed and developing countries.

Guide

Global Literacy

Global literacy is the ability to understand and engage effectively in today's interconnected world. Today's interdependent global economy and geopolitical landscape connect America's interests more than ever to the actions and interests of other countries and their citizens. To ensure students understand this interconnected world, they need to be globally literate. [Learn more about global literacy.](#)

The United Nations is the largest and most prominent international organization. The membership of the UN includes nearly all the world's countries. It was established in 1945, after the end of World War II, by the United States and some four dozen other countries in an effort to build a more peaceful and cooperative postwar world. The United Nations has four main priorities: to keep peace throughout the world, promote fundamental human rights, strengthen international law, and pursue "social progress" and higher standards of living.

One of the most important functions of the United Nations is the maintenance of international peace and security. This is primarily the task of the UN Security Council, a decision-making body that comprises fifteen countries. Five of these countries hold permanent seats and ten are elected on a rotating basis. The five permanent members (known as the P5) are the United States, China, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom. The council's main responsibilities are to evaluate threats to international peace and security and to promote the peaceful resolution of disputes. When a peaceful settlement cannot be reached, the Security Council can impose diplomatic or economic sanctions. The Security Council can even authorize using force to resolve conflicts and prevent new ones. The Security Council has addressed a variety of issues, such as civil wars,

terrorism, arms control, and natural disasters.

Despite its prominent position the Security Council's influence is limited. Any action requires the unanimous agreement of the P5. This means that no resolution can be adopted if even one permanent member votes no—or vetoes—the measure. This kind of agreement is often difficult to reach, especially when a permanent member thinks its interests will be jeopardized if the measure passes. Moreover, the United Nations lacks its own military forces and has no enforcement power. In short, the Security Council can only do that to which its member states agree. These factors mean that countries, especially major powers, can bypass the Security Council or ignore its decisions. Nonetheless, the United Nations is the only organization with essentially universal membership, making it an important feature of international affairs.

Resources related to UN:

- [“What is the UN Security Council,”](#) CFR Education, April 25, 2023.
- [“Current Members | United Nations Security Council,”](#) United Nations.
- [“What Happens When the UN Security Council Can't Agree?,”](#) Better World Campaign, October 21, 2023.
- Séverine Autesserre, [“The Crisis of Peacekeeping: Why the UN Can't End Wars,”](#) *Foreign Affairs*, December 11, 2018.

The UN System

Since its founding in 1945, the United Nations has grown to include 193 member states. The United Nations has several subsidiary bodies, and a network of offices and programs around the world. The nature of the issues on the UN agenda has evolved over time. The Cold War and its associated conflicts dominated for much of the twentieth century. Hostility between the United States and the Soviet Union held up much UN activity. During the Cold War, the Security Council was often deadlocked, given the veto each country held as a permanent member. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, this dynamic began to change. In the past twenty years, issues including climate change, terrorism, and international migration have shifted the UN focus away from interstate conflict. Increasingly, the focus is on problems that transcend national borders.

Organs

The United Nations is divided into six principal organs or parts: the General Assembly, the Secretariat, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and the Security Council.

The General Assembly deliberates on the widest range of issues, spanning all areas of the United Nations' work. The General Assembly is the only body in which all 193 UN member states are represented, each having one vote. General Assembly resolutions are nonbinding. In other words, they are recommendations.

The Secretariat carries out the institution's day-to-day work. Led by the secretary-general and comprising tens of thousands of staff members from various countries, it staffs UN offices around the world. The Secretariat administers peacekeeping missions and operates communications, financial, and many other functions. As the organization's chief administrative officer, the secretary-general attends sessions of UN bodies, consults with world leaders and others, reports on the work of the United Nations, and acts as a spokesperson.

The United Nations also includes the [Economic and Social Council](#). This body is tasked with coordinating and discussing economic, social, and environmental issues. The United Nations also includes the [Trusteeship Council](#), created to provide international supervision for decolonization and now largely inactive. Another organ of the United Nations is the [International Court of Justice](#) (ICJ), responsible for settling legal disputes between countries.

The UN Security Council

The Security Council is tasked with identifying and addressing threats to international security. In addition, it makes recommendations to the General Assembly for the appointment of the secretary-general and the admission of new members to the United Nations. Security Council decisions are communicated through [resolutions](#). These are formal texts that outline steps to be taken and the reasoning behind those steps. In the absence of agreement, the body could also issue [presidential statements](#). Presidential statements are similar in content and form to a formal resolution but do not legally bind member states.

Structure

Membership

The United States, China, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom make up the permanent members of the council. The remaining ten members are elected by the General Assembly to serve two-year terms. In electing nonpermanent council members, the General Assembly considers two factors. It must consider the “contribution of Members of the United Nations to the maintenance of international peace and security and to the other purposes of the Organization.” This stipulation means that aggressive, norm-defying countries tend not to be elected to the council and that countries that contribute significantly to the United Nations (financially or in the form of personnel and equipment) appear more frequently. Second, nonpermanent members must reflect an equitable geographic distribution, meaning members must be elected from each of the major regions of the world.

Presidency

The Security Council presidency is held on a rotating basis by both permanent and nonpermanent member states. The position rotates in English alphabetical order by country name, each country holding office for one month. The president presides over meetings and serves as the Security Council’s representative before all other UN organizations. However, the UN secretary-general, not the Security Council president, sets the agenda for council meetings. The president simply approves this agenda.

Subsidiary Organs

Various subsidiary organs exist to support the Security Council’s mission and implement its resolutions. These range from committees on sanctions, counterterrorism, and nonproliferation to international criminal tribunals that prosecute those responsible for genocide and war crimes. The council also maintains partnerships or close relationships with a variety of other elements in the UN system, such as the [Department of Peacekeeping Operations](#), and the [International Court of Justice](#).

Proceedings

Meetings of the Security Council are typically called when a state—even a nonmember (one of the [two observer states](#) at the United Nations or other states whose sovereignty is disputed)—brings a dispute to the Security Council’s attention. Meetings of the Security Council can also be called when the General Assembly refers a question to the council, or when the secretary-general raises a concern about international peace and security. Once the president decides that a meeting is necessary, they call for a session to address the issue.

Both UN members and nonmembers—the latter if they are parties to a dispute being considered by the Security Council—are invited to participate, though nonmembers do not have a vote in the council’s discussions. If a Security Council member is party to the dispute being discussed, it must abstain (in other words, formally refrain) from voting.

Both Security Council members and invited participants can introduce a draft of a resolution—a ruling or recommendation made by a UN body—expressing a Security Council decision. After debating proposals, any member can call for a vote. A resolution needs nine votes to pass. A dissenting vote from any of the five permanent Security Council members can defeat a resolution, no matter how many affirmative votes it receives. This powerful dissenting vote is known as the veto. Permanent members can use their veto for any reason. Typically, they do so to stop resolutions that threaten their national interests. Security Council members can also abstain from voting. In any case, a resolution passes as long as it receives nine votes and no permanent member exercises a veto. Permanent members sometimes abstain from a vote if they disagree with a resolution but are not sufficiently opposed to veto it.

Powers, Functions, and Tools

If a resolution passes, the Security Council has several powers that it can use to ensure that resolution's implementation. Certain Security Council resolutions are considered legally binding on all UN member states. This means that countries are obligated to comply with the terms of the resolution. This power sets the Security Council apart from other UN organs, which are empowered only to issue recommendations.

The United Nations' founding document, the UN Charter, lays out the tools the Security Council can use to execute its work. These are established in Chapter VI and Chapter VII of the charter. Under [Chapter VI](#), the council can only make recommendations of how parties should resolve a dispute. Under Chapter VII, the council can use more forceful methods. Generally, resolutions under [Chapter VII](#) are considered legally binding.

Chapter VI: Peaceful Settlement of Disputes

Chapter VI allows the Security Council to seek solutions to disputes by “negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means.”

Actions taken under Chapter VI include

- referring legal disputes to the International Court of Justice,
- recommending terms for the settlement of conflicts,
- facilitating dispute resolution through a formal arbitration, and
- launching peacekeeping missions.

The recommendations made under Chapter VI are just that—recommendations. They cannot be imposed on the parties concerned without their consent.

[Peacekeeping missions](#) can fall under Chapter VI or Chapter VII. In the case of Chapter VI missions, forces are deployed to help maintain a peace agreement, cease-fire, or other such arrangement that has already taken hold between warring parties. Peacekeeping missions under Chapter VI can include unarmed observers, lightly armed troops, or both. Their goal is to prevent new outbreaks of conflict and peacefully resolve disputes that arise. UN personnel tend to be stationed along a boundary line and their role is usually to report infractions of peace agreements rather than to intervene. Chapter VI peacekeeping missions require the consent (or agreement) of the parties involved in the conflict, are considered impartial, and do not use force except in self-defense.

Chapter VII: Maintaining or Enforcing Peace

Chapter VII addresses “action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression.”

Actions taken under Chapter VII include

- severing diplomatic relations;
- imposing economic sanctions, travel bans, and financial or diplomatic restrictions;
- creating international tribunals, such as those for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia;
- establishing or modifying peace enforcement or peace-building missions; and

calling for military intervention, either by multinational forces (organized, e.g., by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO]) or by regional organizations (such as the African Union).

Unlike Security Council resolutions issued under Chapter VI, those adopted under Chapter VII are binding. Two examples of Chapter VII resolutions are Resolution 1695, which in 2006 imposed sanctions on North Korea for its nuclear program. Likewise, resolution 1973 in 2011 established the legal basis for military intervention in the Libyan civil war.

One of the most frequently used tools under Chapter VII is the imposition of [sanctions](#). Sanctions are restrictions on a country, organization, or individual, typically limiting the target's ability to travel, trade, or access financial resources. They can be used to discourage certain future actions, such as building nuclear weapons, to pressure a party to act, or to punish it for violating international rules. Sanctions can target entire sectors of a country's economy. Generally, the Security Council pursues targeted sanctions—sometimes called smart sanctions—against certain industries, businesses, or individuals. These can include arms embargoes, travel restrictions, or financial asset freezes.

Sanctions have become a popular tool because they offer a way to intervene in an issue without the risks and costs associated with using military force. However, sanctions have raised some concerns as well. Critics have argued that even highly targeted sanctions can have unintended consequences, especially on already vulnerable populations. Furthermore, the Security Council lacks a concrete method of enforcing its sanctions. Instead, it must rely on individual countries to enact them. If sanctions are weakly enforced, the target could possibly work around them, avoiding their effects and potentially discrediting the value of sanctions in the future.

If nonmilitary options, such as sanctions, fail to resolve a dispute, the Security Council can authorize a peace enforcement mission. Unlike Chapter VI peacekeeping missions, Chapter VII enforcement missions do not require the consent of the parties involved. [Chapter VII enforcement missions](#) are authorized to “take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security.” The personnel involved can include heavily armed troops and can use force in situations other than self-defense. Chapter VII peace enforcement missions can take different forms. Sometimes they are undertaken by UN peacekeeping forces and operate under UN command. In other instances they can be led by a coalition of member states authorized to do so by a Security Council resolution.

The line between Chapter VI and Chapter VII missions is not always clear. A Security Council resolution does not need to explicitly refer to the chapter it is invoking. A mission's mandate—or description of its mission—can change over time to adjust to changing circumstances; a mission established under Chapter VI can be expanded to also fall under Chapter VII if the situation evolves and requires a more robust intervention.

Current Issues

The Security Council was able to greatly expand its activities at the end of the Cold War. Without the United States and the Soviet Union in direct opposition, the number of vetoes declined significantly. The council was able to take action on a greater range of issues, including civil conflicts and humanitarian crises. During the 1990s, the Security Council authorized more peacekeeping missions than it had in the previous forty years combined. It authorized UN-led missions such as those in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. The Security Council also authorized coalition operations such as the 1990 Gulf War. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, international terrorism also came to the forefront of the council's agenda.

The Security Council has also broadened its view of international security in recent years, adopting resolutions on issues such as HIV/AIDS, the protection of women and children in humanitarian crises, and climate change. In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted a series of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aiming to promote global economic development, environmental protection, and social well-being. The SDGs emphasize the interconnected nature of global challenges and the need for cooperation across governments and institutions. Accordingly, the Security Council has paid increasing attention to the ways in which social, economic, and environmental factors influence the maintenance of peace and security.

Despite this increased activity, the Security Council continues to face significant challenges. The United Nations greatly expanded its peacekeeping efforts after the Cold War. But peacekeeping missions have faced criticism for being underfunded, for being limited in scope, and for abuses committed by peacekeepers themselves. In some cases, such as in Rwanda in 1994, peacekeepers have been accused of [failing to prevent genocide](#). Those failures led many countries to argue for a new understanding of peacekeeping and foreign intervention. In 2005, UN member countries adopted the [responsibility to protect](#) (R2P) doctrine. This doctrine establishes that countries have a responsibility to intervene in cases of genocide or crimes against humanity that a national government cannot or will not stop. This remains a nonbinding norm, and its applicability in specific situations is often disputed. Moreover, conflicting interests among the security council's veto-wielding permanent members often curtail the possibility of approving a robust intervention.

In recent years, renewed tension among the United States, China, and Russia has emerged as an obstacle to Security Council action. Observers and Security Council members themselves have [sharply criticized](#) the council's inability to take action on the Syrian civil war. This inability to take action is in spite of multiple reports of war crimes and an estimated death toll of at least [five hundred thousand people](#). Russia, an ally of Syria's government, has vetoed several resolutions aimed at stabilizing the conflict and alleviating the growing humanitarian crisis, arguing that any such resolution would be a violation of Syria's sovereignty. Vetoes have increased in the last decade, with Russia and the United States casting the majority of them.

These challenges have led many UN members, including the United States, to call for changes to the Security Council. Many observers argue that the council's composition, which allots the five permanent seats to the winners of World War II (the United States, China, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom), does not reflect the power structure of today's world. They argue instead for extending permanent membership to more countries and adjusting the regional distribution of permanent membership. These reforms could help better represent large and growing populations in Africa and South America. Another source of criticism has been the P5's veto, which, critics assert, undermines the council's ability to take action. In recent years, a growing number of UN member states—including France, a permanent member—have supported calls for P5 members to voluntarily refrain from using their veto power in situations involving mass atrocities. Other member states have suggested that the veto power be removed altogether.

Reform is controversial and complicated. Any reform of the Security Council would likely require an amendment to the UN Charter that is approved and ratified by a two-thirds vote of the General Assembly and then a vote in the Security Council. Permanent members of the Security Council would retain their usual right to veto. Given this, any reform of the UN Security Council that is not supported, or at least tolerated, by the P5 is unachievable, and garnering such support or tolerance will almost certainly prove impossible.

Case Notes

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CFR Education simulations can be run for several days or weeks and include background readings, videos, and assignments to help students understand the situation and their roles.

[Instructions](#)

[How to Run a CFR Simulation Role-Play](#)

The Issue

Developed or industrialized countries, including the United States, have been releasing [greenhouse gases](#) such as carbon dioxide into the atmosphere for more than a century. These gases are released by burning [fossil fuels](#) for power, heat, transport, and industrial activity. Recently, rapid economic growth in major developing countries such as Brazil, China, and India has led

to significant increases in their [greenhouse gas emissions](#) as well. Greenhouse gases trap the sun's heat in the atmosphere causing a phenomenon known as global warming, which leads to changes in the planet's climate.

Climate change poses risks not only to the environment but also to the security and livelihood of people in the United States and around the world. These effects include rising sea levels, greater heat extremes, more intense precipitation events, deeper droughts, stronger storms, and bigger wildfires. If current trends continue, growing plentiful and affordable food for a rising global population could become more difficult. Populations in low-lying areas—including many of the world's major cities—could be forced to move. Furthermore, extreme weather could threaten the health of billions of people.

Rising greenhouse gas emissions could be addressed through policy at both domestic and international levels. However, if countries with significant emissions fail to act, the overall level of warming will increase. Multiple international agreements on climate change have been developed over the years. The most notable of these is the 2015 [Paris Agreement](#).

The Paris Agreement aims to prevent global warming above 2°C by the end of the century. Given the grave risks, the Paris Agreement urges countries to strive to contain global warming below 1.5°C. However, reducing greenhouse gas emissions worldwide will not be easy. Modern economies depend on fossil fuels. Alternative sources such as solar and wind energy are growing. However, alternative sources cannot fully replace fossil fuels yet. Moreover, currently available measures to increase energy efficiency are costly and time-consuming. Climate change is a difficult issue for policymakers. The questions of how to cut emissions and prepare for climate repercussions, and who should bear the costs of doing so, have few simple answers.

Hypothetical Decision Point

A major climate summit is approaching. At the UN climate summit in Paris in 2015, world leaders pledged to reduce or limit their countries' emissions and to monitor progress toward these goals. However, a new scientific report warns that governments will need to make urgent and unprecedented changes beyond their commitments under the Paris Agreement to avoid serious and potentially irreversible environmental consequences. Despite this alarming information, countries have taken relatively few additional steps toward meeting ambitious targets and in some cases have even retreated from their climate commitments to the Paris Agreement.

As a part of the upcoming summit, the UN Security Council is convening. The Council will discuss, and take possible action on, the issue of climate change. Historically, the UN Security Council has not taken serious action on climate change. This has left climate action under the auspices of states and other UN bodies. In recent years, the council has begun to discuss the effects of climate change on global security. In light of the growing threat that climate change poses, members will need to decide whether addressing climate change is within the Security Council's purview. If so, the Council will then decide on what actions are available that could address climate change generally or limit its effects on global peace and security.

Background

Carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other gases heat the planet through a process known as the [greenhouse effect](#). When sunlight reaches the earth, it heats the surface. Some of that heat is released back into the atmosphere. [Greenhouse gases](#) trap some of that heat rather than allowing it to escape back into space, which warms the atmosphere further. Most greenhouse gases are released during the burning of [fossil fuels](#) such as coal, oil, and natural gas.

Although the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere has changed naturally in the past, the changes being observed now are [much faster and much bigger](#) [PDF] than previous changes. Carbon dioxide levels are now substantially higher than at any other point in millions of years. [Careful analysis](#) of the sources of carbon found in the atmosphere indicates that this rise is due to human activity.

As global temperatures rise, experts warn that extreme weather events including droughts and forest fires will occur more frequently. As a result, major ecosystems will be threatened. Over the past decade, oceans have [warmed faster](#) than expected, and drought and monsoon cycles have intensified. In recent years, global average temperatures have continued to reach ever-higher records. Climate-related wildfires have raged in Australia, the Amazon Rainforest, the Arctic, and California. In the

United States alone, climate change contributed to [twenty-eight separate disasters](#) in 2023. These disasters included hurricanes, wildfires, and extreme storms that amounted to billions of dollars in damage. Some projections show that rising sea levels could [flood populated coastal areas](#) in the United States in the coming decades. Precise forecasts are difficult to make, but [researchers estimate](#) that, worldwide, climate change could force up to one billion people from their homes by 2050 if global temperatures are not moderated.

The over 190 countries that joined the 2015 [Paris Agreement](#) have agreed that in order to avoid catastrophic harm from climate change, temperature increases by 2100 should be kept below a maximum of 2°C, and [preferably below 1.5°C](#) relative to global average temperatures at the start of the [Industrial Revolution](#). Yet little agreement exists on how to achieve this goal. Many policymakers question whether even a 2°C goal can be met.

Many countries are concerned that making the major, rapid reductions required to meet the targets in the Paris Agreement will be expensive, politically controversial, or both. Moreover, countries disagree as to who should bear the most responsibility for achieving that target. Governments of developing countries point out that developed countries bear the most cumulative responsibility for climate change [mitigation](#). This is because developed countries have been emitting at high levels for the longest time. (For example, the United States is the largest overall emitter historically and the second-largest currently.) Governments of developed countries, on the other hand, note that [emissions](#) from developing countries are rising fast, and the majority of future emissions are likely to come from the developing world. (Indeed, China has already surpassed the United States and Europe in CO2 emissions.)

Despite these challenges, addressing climate change has been a prominent international concern since the 1980s. In 1992, the United States and 164 other countries signed the [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC). The goal of this framework was to stabilize greenhouse gases at a level that would prevent dangerous changes in the climate. The convention did not set specific targets for countries. Instead, it established the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities” among countries, placing higher expectations on developed countries. Those countries pledged to voluntarily reduce emissions and make regular reports on their progress. These reports showed little progress in subsequent years toward meeting the voluntary reductions.

The UNFCCC also established a Conference of the Parties (COP), which called treaty signatories to an annual meeting to discuss the agreement’s implementation and make any changes they thought necessary. In 1997, the parties agreed on a change in the agreement. This was known as the [Kyoto Protocol](#), which mandated that thirty-seven industrialized countries reduce their [greenhouse gas](#) emissions by 5 percent below 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012. The protocol had limited results: developing countries faced no required emissions cuts, and the United States, the largest greenhouse gas emitter among developed countries, never ratified the treaty. The treaty failed to decrease reliance on fossil fuels and brought about only modest cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. Despite its limitations, the Kyoto Protocol laid the framework for other, more robust climate agreements, including the Paris accord.

In December 2015, the UNFCCC convened a major summit in Paris. The goal was to negotiate a successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol. Over the course of 2015, countries were asked to submit pledges to the UNFCCC, known as [intended nationally determined contributions](#) (INDCs). (Now that the deal has come into force, these are referred to as nationally determined contributions [NDCs].) These documents were requested from all member countries, rich and poor. These documents outlined what each country intended to do to reduce its current emissions or limit future emissions growth. Most pledges involved reducing CO2 emissions. Some NDCs also addressed issues such as adopting [renewable energy](#) sources, reducing coal use or storing related emissions underground through a process known as carbon capture and sequestration, and preserving or restoring forests. Independent assessments of the pledges found that, collectively, they would reduce emissions significantly if fulfilled, but not by enough to reach the 2°C target recommended by the IPCC.

At the summit, negotiators also debated whether and how to monitor countries’ progress toward fulfilling their pledges and how to make pledges more stringent over time. Policymakers also discussed whether and how to provide financial support to help poor countries adapt to the changing climate and reduce their own emissions. The final agreement called on countries to make new emissions reduction pledges every five years, beginning in 2023, with the hope that they would increase their reduction targets each time. Wealthy countries also pledged additional money to help poor, vulnerable countries adapt to the effects of climate change. The degree to which the agreement is successful in mitigating climate change will only be seen over time. However, most analysts agree that the Paris summit produced the most important global climate agreement since the

Kyoto Protocol.

The Paris Agreement came into force in 2016. In 2017, then U.S. President Donald Trump announced his intention to withdraw the United States from the accord. In response China, India, the [European Union](#), and many other signatories reaffirmed their commitments. The United States' withdrawal from the agreement became effective in late 2020. However, shortly after the inauguration of President Joe Biden in January 2021, the United States rejoined the Paris Agreement.

Though the commitments that states made under the Paris Agreement have resulted in some emissions reductions, the UN Environment Program's annual reveals a significant disparity between the emissions reductions that countries have pledged to make and the total reductions needed to achieve the agreement's goals. Furthermore, most countries are not actually on track to meet the commitments they made in Paris. If current trends continue, [climate models predict](#) that temperatures will more likely rise by 2.7°C. Such a rise in temperature would increase the risk of catastrophic harm from climate change.

Several countries have made historic investments in green initiatives in recent years. The 2022 U.S. [Inflation Reduction Act](#), for instance, included \$370 billion for climate-related projects, making it the largest climate investment in the country's history. European countries, most notably France and Germany, have made large-scale investments in climate initiatives as well. Still the vast majority of countries continue to lag behind on climate spending, making pledges more difficult to fulfill.

Role of the UN Security Council

The United Nations has been involved in addressing climate change for nearly fifty years. However, the first UN Security Council meeting that addressed the connection between climate change and insecurity did not take place until April 2007. The council has increasingly held meetings to discuss the connections between climate and security in the past decade. That being said, the first climate security resolution was not passed until March 2017. [Resolution 2349](#) primarily addressed protection for civilians from [terrorist](#) acts by [Boko Haram](#) in the Lake Chad Basin. The resolution also recognized climate-related risks that would continue to destabilize the region. Effects of the resolution on environmental monitoring remain weak. In recent years, some countries have used their presidential terms at the UN Security Council to organize [high-level debates](#) on climate and security risks. For example, Germany used its term to [establish an informal expert group](#) on climate-related risks to peace and security, which first met in November 2020 and focused on Somalia.

Within the United Nations, the Security Council has the unique authority to adopt resolutions that are considered binding on member states. It also has significant authority to coordinate action across multiple agencies and organizations within the United Nations. Despite multiple UN agencies addressing climate change at different levels already, the UN Security Council has yet to use this authority to address climate issues directly.

So far, council members have not reached a consensus about whether the Security Council should specifically address climate change. In 2021, Ireland and Niger jointly sponsored a [draft resolution](#) acknowledging the effects of climate change on security issues. They called for greater consideration of climate issues in future Security Council matters. The resolution gained the support of twelve members, but ultimately failed after Russia vetoed it.

As the threat of climate change grows and its effects on global security become more apparent, Security Council members will likely need to revisit questions of the Council's role in addressing climate issues. Several members of the council as well as small island states and developing states could argue that climate change represents a security concern. Such a concern could require climate-related assistance to those most directly affected. Other member states could counter that climate change is not in-and-of-itself a threat to international peace and security. Taking this position would mean climate change is outside the purview of the Security Council, which has traditionally only dealt with acute threats. Considering the major warnings expressed by climate experts, some member states could call for the creation of a more robust climate agreement that implements market-based approaches to mitigate climate change.

As members decide what action the Security Council should take on climate change, they will need to consider how to gain the unanimous approval of the five [veto](#)-wielding permanent members of the Security Council. Diverging interests among the permanent members could be a barrier to robust action.

In their deliberations, Security Council members will first need to decide whether it is appropriate for the Security Council to

take action on climate change at all. If they do elect to take action, members could consider several options:

Preparation and Role-Play

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[Instructions](#)

[Video: How to Run a CFR Simulation Role-Play](#)

Roles Overview

Print these [custom placards](#) for use during your simulation. If you need to edit them, make a copy to your Google Drive.

Roles

Permanent Member

There are five permanent UN Security Council members, known as the P5: the United States, China, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom. Permanent members wield veto power, meaning they can block a resolution simply by voting “no.” P5 representatives are responsible for attending meetings, presenting motions, making statements, and voting on behalf of their government, using a veto when necessary.

A P5 country’s representative’s goals are to

- promote their government’s interests and values at the United Nations, specifically by drafting and negotiating Security Council documents;
- liaise and consult with other member states, nonmember states, UN staff, and other interested parties on behalf of their government; and
- analyze how policy options will affect the interests, reputation, and relationships of their country.

Issues for Consideration

- How does climate change threaten your country’s national security?
- What national interests are at stake in this crisis? How should they be prioritized?
- What is your country’s stance on climate issues generally? How does this inform potential national action in this case?
- What is your country’s relationship with other parties relevant to this case? How does this affect your response to the proposed policy options?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the UN Security Council?
- Are there any policy options that you absolutely do not support? If this policy option came to a vote, would you use a [veto](#)? Why or why not?

- How has your country's veto usage changed over time? What issues does your country tend to use a veto on?
- Have other permanent members used vetoes on votes regarding this issue? What kind of policy options or resolutions have they vetoed? How should this influence your negotiation strategy within the Council?
- What are the trade-offs raised by the potential policy options in this case?
- What are the positions and interests of other countries and organizations that have a stake in this issue? How, if at all, might they affect the current situation?

Nonpermanent Member

Ten nonpermanent members—two-thirds of the council—are elected by the UN General Assembly to serve two-year terms. The representatives of nonpermanent members are responsible for attending meetings, presenting motions, making statements, and voting on behalf of their government. Because nonpermanent members are elected to represent one of five regional groups, they are often expected, but not required, to consult with other nonpermanent members of their regional group to ensure they are putting forward a unified policy.

A nonpermanent member country's representative's goals are to

- promote their government's interests and values at the United Nations, specifically by drafting and negotiating Security Council documents;
- liaise and consult with other member states, nonmember states, UN staff, and other interested parties on behalf of their government; and
- analyze how policy options will affect the interests, reputation, and relationships of their country.

Issues for Consideration

- How does climate change threaten your country's national security?
- What national interests are at stake in this crisis? How should they be prioritized? How should they influence your country's response?
- What is your country's stance on climate issues generally? How does this inform potential national action in this case?
- What is your country's relationship with other parties relevant to this case? How does this affect your response to the proposed policy options?
- Have permanent members used vetoes on votes regarding this issue? What kind of policy options or resolutions have they vetoed? How should this influence your negotiation strategy within the Council?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the UN Security Council?
- What are the trade-offs raised by the potential policy options in this case?
- What are the positions and interests of other countries and organizations that have a stake in this issue? How might they affect the current situation?

UN Secretary-General

As the United Nations' chief administrative officer, the secretary-general attends sessions of UN bodies, consults with world leaders and other interested parties, issues reports on the work of the United Nations, and acts as a spokesperson for the organization. The secretary-general is the face of the UN system. Within the UN Security Council, the secretary-general represents the UN Secretariat and assists the council president by preparing agendas for meetings, maintaining the speakers list, and overseeing routine tasks such as the distribution of documents and the logistics for council meetings.

The Secretary-General's goals are to

- promote the maintenance of international peace and security by bringing relevant matters to the attention of the UN Security Council,
- build trust as an honest broker among the participants, and
- represent the interests of the UN Secretariat at the UN Security Council by making statements and setting meeting agendas.

Issues for Consideration

- How does climate change threaten global security?
- What role should the United Nations play in resolving this crisis? What are the benefits and costs of unilateral versus multilateral responses?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the UN Security Council?
- What are the trade-offs raised by the potential policy options in this case?
- What are the positions and interests of UN Security Council member states and other organizations that have a stake in this issue? How, if at all, might they affect the current situation?

Your assignment prior to the role-play is to prepare a set of prepared clauses for a potential Security Council resolution. These clauses, along with those of other students, will form the basis of the discussion in the role-play.

You should bring

- two to three preambular clauses that describe the issue at hand, consider the international context, and outline previous agreements and existing organizations; and
- three to four operative clauses that present responses to the situation.

Each operative clause should present a complete proposal. Make sure that your proposed solutions are within the powers of the Security Council and are practical. Your operative clauses might be designed to work in concert (perhaps economic sanctions, mediation, and a peacekeeping force) or might be a set of alternatives from which you hope one will be adopted (perhaps three peacekeeping proposals that differ in their details).

In writing each of your operative clauses, consider the following points:

- Who: Who is acting, and for whose benefit?
- What: What is the response specifically?
- When: When will it be implemented? Is there a deadline, a time frame, or recurrence?
- Where: Where will it be implemented specifically?
- Why: Why is this solution effective?
- How: How will this solution be implemented? If countries must support the response, how will they be persuaded to do so?
- Funding: How will the response be funded?

If your operative clauses start to get long and messy, use subsidiary clauses!

The goal should be to create clauses that include all the information necessary for putting the plan into action. It can be helpful to imagine an official tasked with carrying out the resolution and asking whether they have all the information they need to implement it.

Guide to the Role-Play

- There is no right or wrong way to participate in a role-play, but the better prepared you are, the more likely you will be able to advance a position effectively, and the more you and your peers will get out of the experience.
- Be patient during the role-play. Do not hold back from sharing your perspective, but be sure to give others a chance to do the same.
- Where there are competing interests, make the judgment calls that you would make if you were a government official, as informed by your earlier consideration of potential trade-offs. Ensure that the consequences of various decisions are carefully weighed.

| Round | Timing | Objectives | Procedural Notes |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|---|--|
| One: Public Meeting | 2 to 3 minutes per participant | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Receive a five-minute briefing from the secretary-general on the issue to be discussed. 2. Present opening statements. 3. Crystalize the central questions of debate. | During opening statements, the president of the UN Security Council will recognize country representatives in the order in which they request to speak, and no representative may speak again if others have not yet spoken. Following opening statements, country representatives are free to openly debate the statements made, evaluating the various positions on their merits. |
| Two: Informal Meeting | 30 to 60 minutes | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Debate each participant's proposed clauses. 2. Edit, add, or drop proposed clauses and combine them into one or more draft resolutions. 3. Draft a presidential statement using proposed clauses and/or new material if no draft resolution appears acceptable to the group. | The president will recognize country representatives in the order in which they request to speak. Representatives should limit their statements to one minute each, but if time allows the president may permit them to speak longer. The president may also invite any participant to speak as they deem it appropriate. Any participant may motion for a ten- to fifteen-minute break, during which representatives can move freely and work on their draft resolutions individually or in small groups. |
| Three: Public Meeting | 30 to 60 minutes | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hear summaries of any draft resolutions as well as arguments for and against adoption. 2. Vote on draft resolutions in order of submission. 3. Attempt to adopt a presidential statement by consensus if no resolutions are proposed or passed. | The president will call first on the draft resolution's main author(s) and then on other countries that wish to make arguments for or against the resolution. To be adopted, Security Council resolutions must receive at least nine votes in favor and no dissenting votes (vetoes) from any of the five permanent members. A state may abstain, often to indicate ambivalence or mild disapproval (in contrast to strong opposition). According to the charter, abstentions are mandatory if the state is a party to the dispute in question. Abstentions by permanent members do not count as vetoes; the resolution will pass if it receives the necessary nine votes. |

Wrap-up

Fuel a lively classroom discussion with simulations that put your students in the shoes of either the National Security Council or the UN Security Council.

CFR Education simulations can be run for several days or weeks and include background readings, videos, and assignments to help students understand the situation and their roles.

Instructions

Role-Play How-To Video

If time permits, you will participate in a debrief following the UN Security Council's final vote.

Be active in this debrief. The role-play might seem to be the most challenging part of the experience, but the debrief is equally important. It will reinforce what you learned during the role-play exercise and refine your analytical skills. It will also force you to step out of your role and to view the case from a personal perspective. You will have the opportunity to discuss any challenges you encountered as you worked through the discussion with your peers and how you felt about the UN Security Council vote.

The debrief will close with a reflection on the complexities and challenges of multilateral negotiations. This should help clarify your understanding of what you learned and answer any lingering questions. This exercise will also assist you in completing your final assignment, the policy review memo.

Reflecting on the Experience

The following questions are proposed to guide the discussion in the debrief. This is not an exhaustive list and may vary depending on how your role-play exercise unfolded. If your class or group does not hold a debrief, these questions will nonetheless help you reflect on the role-play and write your written reflection:

- Which issues received adequate attention during the role-play? Which, if any, received excessive attention or were left unresolved?
- Did the group consider long-term strategic concerns, or was it able to focus only on the immediate issue and the short-term implications of policy options?
- Did time constraints affect the discussion and influence the drafting process?
- What techniques did you use to convince others that your policy position was the best option? What were successful strategies employed by others?
- What were the most significant challenges to your position? Did any make you rethink or adjust your position?
- Did your points cause anyone else to change their arguments or position?
- What political, economic, and other issues arose that you had not previously considered?
- How did the simulation change your perspective on multilateral negotiations?
- If you could go back, what would you have done differently in presenting and advocating your point of view?

Written Reflection

The written reflection is your final assignment in the simulation. In the debrief discussion after the role-play, you and your peers went beyond the role you played and thought about the issue from a variety of perspectives. Now that the UN Security Council meeting and debrief are behind you, you can consider whether you personally support your recommended policy given the subsequent discussion. Shedding your institutional role and writing from a personal point of view, you will craft a policy

review memo that outlines and reflects on the policy options discussed, incorporating and critiquing the UN Security Council's decision where appropriate.

No matter which role you played originally, take into account all that you have learned. Your instructor or facilitator will want to see if and how your understanding of the issue and of the policymaking process has evolved from that expressed in your position memo.

More details about the written reflection are available under Student Resources.

Student Resources

Fuel a lively classroom discussion with simulations that put your students in the shoes of either the National Security Council or the UN Security Council.

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[Instructions How-To Video](#)

Reading List

Country Resources:

Essential facts about your country

- [CIA World Factbook](#)
- [BBC Country Profiles](#)

Information about your country's foreign policy

- [Blue Book | The United Nations Office at Geneva](#)

Essential Resources

- [“Global Climate Change Policy Case Study,”](#) YouTube, 2:12, posted by the CFR Education, August 3, 2015.
- [“What is Climate Change?”](#) YouTube video, 4:26, posted by CFR Education, September 1, 2021.
- [“Who is Responsible for Climate Change,”](#) YouTube, 2:54, posted by CFR Education, June 18, 2019.
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, [“Kyoto Protocol.”](#)
- [“The Paris Agreement,”](#) CFR Education, July 15, 2023.
- [“Cap and Trade Basics,”](#) *Center for Climate and Energy Solutions.*
- Lindsay Getschel, [“UN Security Council Can Do More to Address Climate Change,”](#) The Stimson Center, April 5, 2019.
- [“Climate and Security at the UNSC,”](#) *Climate Security Expert Network.*
- Nathan Hultman and Samantha Gross, [“How the United States Can Return to Credible Climate Leadership,”](#) Brookings, March 1, 2021.
- [“FACT SHEET: President Biden Takes Executive Actions to Tackle the Climate Crisis,”](#) The White House, January 27, 2021.
- [YOUTUBE PLAYLIST](#)

Additional Resources

- Joshua Busby, [“Warming World: Why Climate Change Matters More than Anything Else,”](#) *Foreign Affairs*, July 2018.
- ©2025 Council on Foreign Relations. All rights reserved. [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Use](#).

- [“Climate Change Crash Course,”](#) *New York Times*, April 19, 2020.
- NASA, [“Climate Q & A.”](#)
- PBS Frontline, [“Timeline: The Politics of Climate Change,”](#) October 23, 2012.
- [“Exploring Carbon Pricing Method,”](#) YouTube, 4:20, posted by TDC, December 20, 2020.
- Toni Johnson, [“The Debate Over Greenhouse Gas Cap-and-Trade,”](#) CFR.org Backgrounder, November 3, 2011.
- Dana Nuccitelli, [“Can a Carbon Tax Work Without Hurting the Economy? Ask British Columbia,”](#) *Guardian*, July 30, 2013.
- Robert E. Rubin, [“How Ignoring Climate Change Could Sink the U.S. Economy,”](#) Washington Post, July 24, 2014.
- Stewart M. Patrick, [“The World Is Woefully Unprepared for Climate-Driven Natural Disasters,”](#) Council on Foreign Relations, February 22, 2021.
- Coral Davenport and Campbell Robertson, [“Resettling the First American ‘Climate Refugees’,”](#) *New York Times*, May 3, 2016.

How to Conduct Research and Use Sources

Research and Preparation

- Draw on the case notes, additional case materials, and your own research to familiarize yourself with
 - the goals of the UN Security Council in general and of this Council meeting in particular;
 - the national interests at stake in the case for the country you’re representing and their importance to national security;
 - the aspects of the case most relevant to your country;
 - the elements that a comprehensive UN Security Council resolution on the case should contain; and
 - the major debates or conflicts likely to occur during the role-play. You need not resolve these yourself, of course, but you will want to anticipate them in order to articulate and defend your position in the UN Security Council deliberation.
- Set goals for your research. Know which questions you seek to answer and refer back to the case notes, additional readings, and research leads as needed.
- Make a list of questions that you feel are not fully answered by the given materials. What do you need to research in greater depth? Can your peers help you understand these subjects?
- Using the case materials, additional readings, and discussions with your peers, weigh the relative importance of the interests at stake in the case. Determine where trade-offs might be required and think through the potential consequences of several different policy options.
- Conduct your research from the perspective of your assigned role, rather than the particular perspective of the person who currently inhabits that role. Make sure to consider the full range of country positions and foreign interests, whether diplomatic, military, economic, environmental, moral, or otherwise. This will help you strengthen your policy position and anticipate and prepare for debates in the role-play.
- Consider what questions or challenges the secretary-general or other UN Security Council members might raise regarding the options you propose and have responses ready.

Sources

- Consult a wide range of sources to gain a full perspective on the issues raised in the case and on policy options. Seek out sources that you may not normally use, such as publications from the region(s) under discussion, unclassified and declassified government documents, and specialized policy reports and journals.
- Remember: Wikipedia is not a reliable source, but it can be a reasonable starting point. The citations at the bottom of each entry often contain useful resources.
- Just as policymakers tackle issues that are controversial and subject to multiple interpretations, so will you in your preparation for the writing assignments and role-play. For this reason, evaluate your sources carefully. Always ask yourself:
 - When was the information produced? Is it still relevant and accurate?

- Who is writing or speaking and why? Does the author or speaker have a particular motivation or affiliation that you should take into account?
- Where is the information published? Determine the political leanings of journals, magazines, and newspapers by reading several articles published by each one.
- Who is the intended audience?
- Does the author provide sufficient evidence for their analysis or opinion? Does the author cite reliable and impartial sources?
- Does the information appear one-sided? Does it consider multiple points of view?
- Is the language measured or inflammatory? Do any of the points appear exaggerated?
- Take note of and cite your sources correctly. This is important not just for reasons of academic integrity, but so that you can revisit them as needed.
- Ask your teacher which style they prefer you use when citing sources, such as Modern Language Association (MLA), Chicago Manual of Style, or Associated Press (AP).

How to Write a UN Resolution

What is a UN resolution?

A UN resolution is a formal expression of the opinion or will of a UN body. Resolutions follow a common, relatively strict format and are published online once approved. They are written and approved (or rejected) in a complex process. They typically go through several drafts, and multiple countries are typically involved, though a single country may write a draft resolution on its own and seek a direct vote. You will navigate an abbreviated version of this collaborative process in your role-play.

A Security Council resolution has three sections:

- header
- preambular clauses
- operative clauses

The entire resolution is one long sentence; individual items are separated by semicolons and commas. The header gives the date, an alphabetical list of countries that have contributed to the document (sponsors), and the name of the issuing body (in this case, the Security Council). This body serves as the subject of the sentence.

Preambular clauses provide a framework through which to view the issue by outlining past action on the subject (usually in treaties, conventions, and previous resolutions) and explaining the purpose of or need for a resolution. Preambular clauses are unnumbered, begin with adjectives or verbs, and end with commas. Common preambular words include

- alarmed by
- considering
- convinced
- emphasizing
- guided by
- having adopted
- keeping in mind
- mindful of
- (re)affirming

- recognizing
- taking note/noting
- underscoring

An example of an [existing](#) preambular clause is

- *Underlining* that the NPT remains the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and the essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament and for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Operative clauses state the opinion of the organ and the actions to be taken. Unlike preambular clauses, operative clauses are sequentially numbered and follow a logical progression, each clause calling for a specific action. Operative clauses begin with italicized verbs, sometimes modified by adverbs, and end with semicolons (with the exception of the last clause). Common operative words include

- authorizes
- calls for
- condemns
- decides
- emphasizes
- (re)affirms
- recommends
- reiterates
- requests
- stresses
- supports
- urges

The last operative clause in a Security Council resolution is almost always “*Decides* to remain seized of the matter.” In line with [Article 12](#) of the UN Charter, this language keeps the issue under the Security Council’s authority and prevents the General Assembly from taking its own action. An example existing operative clause is

- *Urges* all States that have either not signed or not ratified the Treaty, particularly the eight remaining Annex 2 States, to do so without further delay.

Click [here](#) to see a full example of a UN Security Council resolution.

If the Security Council is unable to come to agreement on a resolution, another option is to issue a presidential statement.

What is a presidential statement?

A presidential statement is made by the president of the Security Council on behalf of the council. It is adopted at a formal council meeting, issued as an official document, and [published](#). No formal vote is taken on a presidential statement; instead, it is adopted by consensus (the agreement of all members, though some may abstain). Member states have the option of voicing opposition to the statement, which is then recorded in the document. Often released when the council cannot reach consensus on a resolution or is prevented from passing one by a permanent member’s veto, presidential statements are similar in content and tone to resolutions but tend to be less specific. They are not legally binding.

All presidential statements generally follow the same loose structure, which is more flexible and relaxed than that of a UN resolution:

1. **Overview:** an overview of the meeting or informal session that gave rise to the statement in question.
2. **Body:** five to fifteen paragraphs, each beginning with “The Security Council,” reflecting the consensus opinion of council members and sometimes providing an overview of past actions on the subject. A presidential statement is often

used to reaffirm the council's support for ongoing UN missions and initiatives or to provide progress reports on these initiatives.

3. Signature: the signature of the president of the Security Council.

Click [here](#) to see a full example of a UN Security Council presidential statement.

How to Prepare for Role-Play

Role-play Guidelines

1. Stay in your role at all times. (Keep in mind that your role refers to the perspective and duties of the country or position you represent, and not the specific person currently holding that role.)
2. Follow the general protocol for speaking.
 1. Signaling to Speak
 1. The president of the UN Security Council will administer the meeting and should decide on a speaking order. Wait to be called on by the president.
 2. If you would like to speak out of turn, signal to the president, perhaps by raising a hand or a placard, and wait until the president calls on you.
 2. Form of Speech
 1. All UN Security Council members can be addressed as Mr./Madam/Mx. Ambassador or simply Ambassador [last name]. Before you begin the role-play, share which title you would like to use, and make sure to respect the title your fellow UN Security Council members choose to use as well.
 2. Do not exceed predetermined time limits. If you exceed these limits, the president will cut you off.
 3. Frame your comments with a purpose and stay on topic.
 3. Listening
 1. Take notes while others are speaking.
 2. Refrain from whispering or conducting side conversations.
 3. Applause and booing are not appropriate. Your words will be the most effective tool to indicate agreement or disagreement.

How to Write a Written Reflection

Guidelines

- **Subject (one short paragraph):** Offer a brief statement about the significance of the issue as it relates to global politics and international organizations. Provide just enough information about the crisis so the reader can understand the purpose and importance of your memo. Be sure to include an initial statement of whether you agree or disagree with the UN Security Council's decision.
- **Options and analysis (one paragraph per option):** Present and analyze the options that were discussed during the debate, deliberation, and/or debrief. Discuss their drawbacks, benefits, and resource needs. Be sure to acknowledge any weaknesses or disadvantages of the proposed options.
- **Recommendation and justification (several paragraphs):** Identify and explain your preferred policy option or options in more detail. Here, you can explain why you personally favor one or more of the recommendations that you initially presented or the UN Security Council voted on, or different options entirely. If you choose to support the options you presented in your position memo, make sure to justify why you feel yours is still the best position.

- **Reflection (one to two paragraphs):** Discuss how your position and the final UN Security Council decision are similar; if they are not, discuss how they are different. Use this section to give your thoughts on what the UN Security Council should have included in its resolution or presidential statement and what you would have done differently. Remember, this is from your point of view; you are no longer advocating on behalf of a country or a UN agency.

Click [here](#) to see a full example of a written reflection.

Global Climate Change Policy (UNSC)

Educator Simulation Guide

Global Literacy

Global literacy is the ability to understand and engage effectively in today's interconnected world. Today's interdependent global economy and geopolitical landscape connect America's interests more than ever to the actions and interests of other countries and their citizens. To ensure students understand this interconnected world, they need to be globally literate. [Learn more about global literacy.](#)

Case Overview

Fictional, set in the present day. Developed countries have been releasing [greenhouse gases](#) into the atmosphere since the dawn of the [Industrial Revolution](#). In recent decades, rapid economic growth in major developing countries such as China, India, and Brazil have led to significant increases in their own [greenhouse gas emissions](#). The [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#), and other organizations and governments have concluded that the warming observed in recent decades is a consequence of human activity. The effects of this global warming or climate change pose risks not only to the environment, but also to the security and livelihoods of people around the world, both now and in the future. Various international responses are possible, but the questions of how to cut emissions and prepare for climate consequences, and who should bear the costs of doing so, have few simple answers. UN Security Council members will need to weigh the options, bearing in mind the potential impact of climate change, the potential effects of proposed measures to limit or prevent it, and the need to secure international support for the [multilateral](#) approach from both developed and developing countries.

Decision Point

A major climate summit is approaching. At the UN climate summit in Paris in 2015, world leaders pledged to reduce or limit their countries' [emissions](#) and to monitor progress toward these goals. However, a new scientific report warns that governments will need to make urgent and unprecedented changes beyond their commitments under the [Paris Agreement](#) to avoid serious and potentially irreversible environmental consequences. Despite this alarming information, countries have taken relatively few additional steps toward meeting ambitious targets and in some cases have even retreated from their climate commitments to the Paris Agreement.

As a part of the upcoming summit, the UN Security Council is convening. The Council will discuss, and take possible action on, the issue of climate change. Historically, the UN Security Council has not taken serious action on climate change. This has left climate action under the auspices of states and other UN bodies. In recent years, the council has begun to discuss the effects of climate change on global security. In light of the growing threat that climate change poses, members will need to decide whether addressing climate change is within the Security Council's purview. If so, the Council will then decide on what actions are available that could address climate change generally or limit its effects on global peace and security.

Learning Goals

CFR Education extended simulations use a variety of pedagogical tools to create an effective, meaningful, and memorable learning experience for students that builds their global literacy. Students will develop crucial skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. Students will complete authentic assessments that feel relevant: instead of five-paragraph essays and book reports, students will write policy memos and participate in a role-play of a meeting of a foreign policy-making body. There are no right or wrong answers in actual policy deliberations, and there are none here, either; students will walk away from this experience with an appreciation for the complexity of policy questions.

In this simulation, students will learn about the UN Security Council, as well as meeting these learning outcomes specific to this simulation:

- Students will understand threats posed by climate change as well as the international attempts to address it through international agreements such as the [Paris Agreement](#).
- Students will consider if the UN Security Council should take action on climate change as a threat to global security.
- Students will evaluate if it is appropriate for the Security Council to take action on climate change and, if so, consider the actions it will take.

Concepts and Issues

Concepts

- International environmental policy
- International economic policy
- Multilateralism
- International development

Issues

- Intersection of climate change and international security
- Interests and responsibility of developing and developed states
- Uncertainty of threats and of policy effects

Policy Options: Educator's Guide

This section presents context, potential benefits and drawbacks, and other information about the policy options outlined in the case that you may find helpful as you guide the role-play and assess students.

The UN Security Council's task is to determine what its role is in addressing climate change and how the Security Council should approach the intersection between climate and security moving forward. As members decide what, if any, action the Security Council should take on climate change, they will need to consider how to gain the unanimous approval of the five [veto](#)-wielding permanent members of the Security Council, whose diverging interests could be a barrier to robust action.

Policy Options

The United Nations has been involved in addressing climate change for nearly fifty years. However, the first UN Security Council meeting that addressed the connection between climate change and insecurity did not take place until April 2007. The council has increasingly held meetings to discuss the connections between climate and security in the past decade. That being said, the first climate security resolution was not passed until March 2017. [Resolution 2349](#) primarily addressed protection for civilians from [terrorist](#) acts by [Boko Haram](#) in the Lake Chad Basin. The resolution also recognized climate-related risks that

would continue to destabilize the region. Effects of the resolution on environmental monitoring remain weak. In recent years, some countries have used their presidential terms at the UN Security Council to organize [high-level debates](#) on climate and security risks. For example, Germany used its term [to establish an informal expert group](#) on climate-related risks to peace and security, which first met in November 2020 and focused on Somalia.

Within the United Nations, the Security Council has the unique authority to adopt resolutions that are considered binding on member states. It also has significant authority to coordinate action across multiple agencies and organizations within the United Nations. Despite multiple UN agencies addressing climate change at different levels already, the UN Security Council has yet to use this authority to address climate issues directly.

So far, council members have not reached a consensus about whether the Security Council should specifically address climate change. In 2021, Ireland and Niger jointly sponsored a [draft resolution](#) acknowledging the effects of climate change on security issues. They called for greater consideration of climate issues in future Security Council matters. The resolution gained the support of twelve members, but ultimately failed after Russia vetoed it.

As the threat of climate change grows and its effects on global security become more apparent, Security Council members will likely need to revisit questions of the Council's role in addressing climate issues. Several members of the council as well as small island states and developing states could argue that climate change represents a security concern. Such a concern could require climate-related assistance to those most directly affected. Other member states could counter that climate change is not in-and-of-itself a threat to international peace and security. Taking this position would mean climate change is outside the purview of the Security Council, which has traditionally only dealt with acute threats. Considering the major warnings expressed by climate experts, some member states could call for the creation of a more robust climate agreement that implements market-based approaches to mitigate climate change.

As members decide what action the Security Council should take on climate change, they will need to consider how to gain the unanimous approval of the five veto-wielding permanent members of the Security Council. Diverging interests among the permanent members could be a barrier to robust action.

In their deliberations, Security Council members will first need to decide whether it is appropriate for the Security Council to take action on climate change at all. If they do elect to take action, members could consider several options:

Formally Expand the Scope of the UN Security Council to Reflect Climate Change as a Threat to International Security

The UN Security Council could decide that climate change represents a threat to international peace and security. Therefore it would fall within the council's purview to address. In its most ambitious form, this option could entail adopting a resolution authorizing peacekeeping missions to climate-threatened areas change-related food and water scarcity. As climate driven scarcity and displacement grows more acute, a peacekeeping force could maintain stability and ensure access to humanitarian aid.

The Security Council could further demand that member states allow regular independent risk assessments of their [mitigation](#) strategies to ensure they are compatible with UN climate goals. Members could also consider addressing climate risks to international security by building out early-warning systems and commissioning annual reports on climate and security. They could further create a Climate Security Committee within the council to institutionalize future climate-related action and coordinate the activity of other UN organs to address climate risks.

This option would represent an unprecedented expansion of the Security Council's operations. However, it could allow for a robust international climate response and mitigate many security risks posed by climate change. It is likely to be controversial and could alienate large emitters such as China.

Call for a Renegotiation of the [Paris Agreement](#)

Considering the security risks raised by climate change and the insufficiency of the Paris Agreement as outlined by climate experts, members could decide to adopt a resolution calling for renewed climate negotiations. This move could prompt the creation of a more robust climate agreement with stricter [emissions](#) targets.

A new international climate agreement could also adopt new measures to secure emissions reductions, including:

- Global [cap-and-trade](#) system: A global cap-and-trade system would set national limits on emissions and establish an international market for permits. The Paris Agreement lays out a framework for a global cap-and-trade system to directly limit emissions and creates a market price for them, but this system has not yet been established. Under a renewed agreement, a global cap-and-trade system could cap emissions at an agreed-upon level and issue or sell emissions permits adding up to that cap to major emitters. Those emitting less than their allotted amount could sell their extra permits to others emitting more. This would create a financial incentive to emit less. Over time, the cap could be lowered, increasing the value of the ever-scarcer permits and ensuring that emissions decline. Under such a system, wealthy countries unable to meet their targets could also fund an emissions-reduction project in a developing country as compensation, a practice known as offsetting.
- [Carbon tax](#): A carbon tax does not directly limit emissions. However, by setting a price on CO₂ emissions (usually per ton), it creates a financial incentive to reduce them. To the extent that the tax is factored in the price of consumer goods and electricity, it could make these items more expensive. This option could encourage individuals to consume goods associated with lower carbon emissions. It could also cause them to consume fewer goods and less energy overall. A tax would also raise revenue that governments could use to lower deficits, provide new services, or decrease other taxes. A global tax could be agreed to at the international level. However, in most cases, including in the United States, such a tax would also need to be approved by national legislatures.

A binding, international agreement would be the most ambitious goal and could have the most benefit. However, it also faces the most obstacles. Such an agreement would be expensive for countries to implement. Stringent climate standards could drive up prices on many goods, potentially harming those living in poverty. Developed and developing countries often disagree on who should bear the main responsibility for mitigation efforts. This makes an agreement that binds countries to specific steps difficult to achieve. Member states could consider whether to mandate subsidies as a method of offsetting the financial consequences of any agreement. Both cap-and-trade systems and carbon taxes are also [politically controversial](#) in many countries, including the United States. Given these obstacles, member states will need to consider how to ensure maximum participation in negotiations. If climate activists and leaders perceive that an agreement stronger than the Paris Agreement cannot be reached, they could opt to not partake in new negotiations. On the other hand, if an agreement is perceived as too severe, it could drive major emitters away.

Implement Climate-Related Assistance

The UN Security Council could adopt a resolution requiring high-emitting member states to provide financial, technological, or professional assistance to poorer countries to help them mitigate their emissions, develop or adopt new technology, or adapt to climate change.

Wealthier countries could, for example, directly finance green projects in developing countries, including renewable power plants and anti-[deforestation](#) initiatives. Many countries and organizations, including the United States and international financial institutions, have already been doing this through [climate funds](#). [Adaptation](#) assistance likewise could take many forms. These adaptations could include support such as sharing better climate information, providing drought-resistant seeds to help farmers better cope with climate effects, and assisting in infrastructure improvements such as flood protection systems.

Climate-related assistance, whether pursued alone or as part of a broader approach, is subject to debate. Advocates often argue that it is morally necessary because many poor countries have done little to contribute to climate change but are likely to suffer some of its worst effects. Such assistance could also have practical political effects. It demonstrates that industrialized countries are willing to address the concerns and needs of developing countries. This can increase the willingness of developing countries to join global mitigation efforts. Nevertheless, members could simply not want to commit their resources to providing assistance for other countries or they could not consider climate a priority security issue for the UN Security Council.

Running the Simulation

CFR Education extended simulations are project-based learning activities. Project-based learning (PBL) [leads to](#) better learning outcomes and improves skills, and is more fun than traditional instructional methods. The website that students will navigate throughout the simulation is divided into several parts:

In the **UNSC Guide**, students will learn about the UN Security Council, the body they will be simulating. Included are details on its history, how it works, who its major players are, and more. There is also a video interview with experts who have served on the body.

In the **Case Notes**, students dive into the actual situation they will be trying to solve in their simulation. At the beginning is a clear decision point: the question that students will debate during the role-play. This is followed by detailed background material and a discussion of the role that the United Nations plays.

Preparation and Role-Play includes details on the various roles students could take on, guidelines for the draft resolution clauses they will write, as well as an outline of how the discussion will flow during the role-play.

The **Wrap-Up** is an important part of the project and includes reflection questions and guidelines for reflecting in a class discussion and in a second memorandum. For historical cases, this section also includes a short description of how the decision point was addressed by policymakers in real life.

The simulation also includes **Student Resources**, which include a reading list to support research, additional directions and exemplars for writing assignments, and other tips students may find helpful.

Tips for Role-Play

Once students have read the simulation and prepared their draft clauses, here is how we recommend structuring the role-play:

| Round | Timing | Objectives | Procedural Notes |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|---|--|
| One: Public Meeting | 2 to 3 minutes per participant | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Receive a five-minute briefing from the secretary-general on the issue to be discussed. 2. Present opening statements. 3. Crystalize the central questions of debate. | During opening statements, the president of the UN Security Council will recognize country representatives in the order in which they request to speak, and no representative may speak again if others have not yet spoken. Following opening statements, country representatives are free to openly debate the statements made, evaluating the various positions on their merits. |
| Two: Informal Meeting | 30 to 60 minutes | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Debate each participant's proposed clauses. 2. Edit, add, or drop proposed clauses and combine them into one or more draft resolutions. 3. Draft a presidential statement using proposed clauses and/or new material if no draft resolution appears acceptable to the group. | The president will recognize country representatives in the order in which they request to speak. Representatives should limit their statements to one minute each, but if time allows the president may permit them to speak longer. The president may also invite any participant to speak as they deem it appropriate. Any participant may motion for a ten- to fifteen-minute break, during which representatives can move freely and work on their draft resolutions individually or in small groups. |
| Three: Public Meeting | 30 to 60 minutes | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hear summaries of any draft resolutions as well as arguments for and against adoption. 2. Vote on draft resolutions in order of submission. 3. Attempt to adopt a presidential statement by consensus if no resolutions are proposed or passed. | The president will call first on the draft resolution's main author(s) and then on other countries that wish to make arguments for or against the resolution. To be adopted, Security Council resolutions must receive at least nine votes in favor and no dissenting votes (vetoes) from any of the five permanent members. A state may abstain, often to indicate ambivalence or mild disapproval (in contrast to strong opposition). According to the charter, abstentions are mandatory if the state is a party to the dispute in question. Abstentions by permanent members do not count as vetoes; the resolution will pass if it receives the necessary nine votes. |

Tips for the President of the UN Security Council

In Round 1, you will chair a formal session. Make absolutely sure that every country gives their opening statement before any country is allowed to speak a second time. You will also have to use your judgment about when to move into the more informal meeting of Round 2. Give enough time for students to flesh out their positions and to identify potential allies, but do not wait too long—the most productive negotiations happen in informal meetings, so you want to save time for those in Round 2.

In Round 2, you will call on speakers one at a time. The time limits on speeches are a little looser, so pay close attention to make sure everyone is included and no one dominates. Deciding whether to grant a break for negotiations is a matter of balance. Negotiations can be advanced in small-group discussions, but it is also important for the whole body to be updated on what goes on during the breaks. You will want to strike a balance between breaks for negotiating, and informal meeting time for giving updates and rounding up support for resolutions. It is often helpful to set a deadline for the end of Round 2 to encourage negotiators to come to agreements in a timely manner.

In Round 3, completed draft resolutions will be presented, discussed, and voted on. Before starting, make sure you are clear on the order in which the resolutions were submitted and who is sponsoring each one. When it comes time to vote, it will be helpful to remind everyone of the unique voting rules of the Security Council. If none of the resolutions passes, you can allow further debate and attempt to vote again, or you can move on and guide the council through debate on a presidential statement.

Use your judgment about which process is more likely to be successful.

Tips for Online Classes

We suggest conducting the role-play in three rounds and that three-round structure is a helpful way to approach chunking the role-play for online learning as well. You can conduct each round synchronously or asynchronously.

In round one, participants present their positions.

- In a synchronous meeting, you can go through opening statements using videoconferencing software, allowing for live clarifying questions.
- However, this is probably the easiest round to conduct asynchronously. You could disseminate positions in writing by having participants share their position memos or write a summary for the purpose of the role-play. You could also have participants record a video of themselves delivering their opening statement and disseminate it for all to watch.

In round two, participants debate the various policy options.

- In a synchronous setting, you can simply run a full-class discussion for round two. If you need more structure or want to prod reticent participants, consider starting by randomly assigning students to breakout rooms, assigning each breakout room one policy option. After working through pros and cons, representatives from each breakout room can share out to kick off the general discussion.
- In an asynchronous setting, consider a discussion forum, with a thread for each policy option.

In round three, debate begins to coalesce around the draft resolutions that have substantial support.

- This round can be approached similarly to round two. In this round, organize breakout rooms or threads around each draft resolution.

Flashpoints

This case offers no flashpoints.

Case Assessment

1. What are [greenhouse gases](#), how are they produced, and what is their connection to climate change?
2. What are some examples of the effects—environmental, economic, security related, and more—that scientists and analysts project will occur as a result of climate change, and why are they important?
3. What limit did the 190 nations of the [Paris Agreement](#) set for global average temperature increases by 2100? What is the risk of temperatures rising beyond this limit?
4. How is climate change a threat to international security? Why is it important for the Security Council to discuss climate-related risks?
5. Why have major [greenhouse gas](#) emitters in the developed and developing worlds traditionally disagreed over the responsibility of various countries to make [emissions](#) reductions, and what approaches might help overcome this disagreement?
6. How do a [cap-and-trade](#) system and carbon taxes work, and what are some benefits and challenges surrounding the implementation of these policies?

UNSC Assessment

1. What are the six organs of the United Nations system? What are their responsibilities?
2. How is the UN Security Council structured? How are Security Council decisions made?
3. What are the two categories of tools that the UN Security Council has at its disposal to implement its decisions, and what are the range of specific tools available in each?
4. What is the difference between a Chapter VI peacekeeping mission and a Chapter VII peace enforcement mission?
5. What are the main challenges and limitations that the UN Security Council faces as it carries out its work? What solutions have been proposed to address these challenges?

Writing Assignments

Each CFR Education extended simulation involves writing assignments that help students think through policy options and reflect on their learning experience.

In UNSC cases, there are two types of writing assignments.

- Before the role-play, everyone writes draft clauses for a Security Council resolution.
- As part of the wrap-up, everyone writes a written reflection.

Simulations have instructions for written assignments (found under the Student Facing Simulation), rubrics, and samples for each of these writing exercises.

Samples:

- [UN example resolution](#)
- [UN example presidential statement](#)

Rubric

Below are sample rubrics for your use in assessing the writing students will do as part of this extended simulation.

These are single-point rubrics. Jennifer Gonzalez, who writes the blog [Cult of Pedagogy](#), has a great [explainer](#), but the bottom line is that single-point rubrics are relatively easy for students to digest but still have all the advantages of giving structure to instructors' feedback.

UN Security Council Draft Clauses Rubric

CONCERNS*What needs improvement***CRITERIA***What is expected***ADVANCED***What is excellent***Purpose**

- There are two to three preambular and three to four operative clauses
- Clauses are properly formatted and styled

Preambular clauses

- Accurately identify relevant prior agreements and existing organizations

Operative clauses

- Are practical and within the UN Security Council's powers
 - Address who
 - Address what
 - Address when
 - Address where
 - Address why
 - Address how
 - Address funding
-

UN Security Council Written Reflection Rubric

CONCERNS

What needs improvement

CRITERIA

What is expected

ADVANCED

What is excellent

Subject paragraph

- Is brief
- Places the issue in the larger context of U.S. foreign policy
- Clearly states whether the writer agrees or disagrees with the president's decision

Options and Analysis paragraph

- Discusses each option that came up during the role-play in discrete paragraphs
- Weighs the advantages and disadvantages of each option
- If options from the position memo are discussed, those options contain additional analysis

Recommendation and Justification paragraph

- Makes a clear recommendation based on the writer's personal position
- Supports the recommendation effectively

Reflection paragraph or paragraphs

- Reflects on and critiques the Security Council's decision
- Is written from a personal point of view, not that of the assigned role

Downloadable rubrics are available here:

- [UNSC draft clauses rubric](#)
- [UNSC written reflection rubric](#)