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Unrest in Bahrain in 2014 (UNSC)

Set in August 2014. Political unrest in Bahrain has led to a government crackdown.

Case Overview

Set in August, 2014. In the small island country of Bahrain, government and security forces have clashed with protestors seeking democratic reform. The ruling [al-Khalifa](#) family has responded to these protests with force and mass arrests. The most recent clashes between government forces and protestors are not the first but certainly the bloodiest. In February 2011, Bahraini activists, inspired by uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, gathered in the capital to seek political reform. The fact that Bahrain's leaders are part of the Sunni minority and the demonstrators represent the Shiite majority gives the uprising a [sectarian](#) complexion, in addition to the broader social issues of disenfranchisement and limited economic opportunity. The UN Secretary-General has called a meeting of the UN Security Council to assess whether the situation warrants a response and, if so, what kind.

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

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](#)

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

The Issue

In the small island country of Bahrain, located in the Persian Gulf, government and security forces have clashed with protesters seeking democratic reform. Bahrain's leaders belong to the Sunni sect of Islam, a minority in the country; the majority of Bahrainis are Shiite. Bahrain has a history of Sunni-Shiite tension. However, that tension is only one dimension of the problems that have unfolded in the country. Broader societal stressors also drive calls for reform. These issues include repression, disenfranchisement, and limited economic opportunity for the country's majority.

Bahraini activists gathered in the country's capital, Manama, in February 2011. They demanded reforms from the government. These reforms included a new constitution that would provide an elected parliament and independent courts. Also included in the reforms were the release of protesters arrested in police crackdowns as well as freedom of expression. Opposition groups made more forceful calls for Bahrain to become a true [constitutional monarchy](#) and for an end to King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa's rule. The ruling Al Khalifa family responded to these protests with force and mass arrests.

Similar uprisings in the Middle East received robust international support. Most notably, the UN Security Council voted to authorize military intervention in Libya to protect civilians amid a popular uprising against the ruling Muammar al-Qaddafi regime. However, Bahrain's opposition movement was unable to rally the same international support. This lack of support was, in part, because two permanent UN Security Council members, the United States and the United Kingdom, had long-standing military and economic ties with the country. Nevertheless, continuing unrest and repression in Bahrain raised the question of whether international action would be needed to ensure the protection of human rights in Bahrain.

Decision Point—*Set in August 2014*

Three years after Bahrain's 2011 uprising, progress toward reform has stalled. In January 2014, the government suspended its "national dialogue" with opposition groups. The government blamed opposition groups for the breakdown. Soon after, renewed unrest gripped the country. On February 14—the anniversary of the initial uprising—thousands of protestors calling for King Hamad's ouster gathered in Bahrain's capital, Manama. The protestors met stiff resistance from security forces. This resulted in several injuries and dozens of arrests. Outside the capital, a bomb struck a police bus in a Shiite village, killing one police officer. Three more officers were killed by another bomb weeks later. Although mainstream opposition groups denied any connection to the bombings and condemned the acts, the attacks only amplified an already severe crackdown by Bahrain's security forces. This crackdown was especially focused on predominantly Shiite areas. Activists, along with international human rights organizations, are calling for an international response. In this context, the UN Secretary-General has called a meeting of the UN Security Council. The Council will assess whether the situation warrants a response and, if so, what kind.

Background

Bahrain is a country about one-fifth the size of Rhode Island and has a population of [1.5 million](#). Most sources indicate that the Bahraini citizenry is about 70 percent Shiite. However, the government maintains that the actual proportion is smaller.

Bahrain has been ruled by the Al Khalifa family since its ancestors arrived from neighboring Qatar in 1783. Although the country has been widely perceived to be more open and progressive than its neighbors in the Gulf, the reality is complex. Bahrain's government has adopted policies aimed at supporting religious tolerance, bolstering public health care and schooling, and upholding women's rights, including the right to vote and run for office.

Despite these policies, Bahrain has long had a dismal human rights record marked by a lack of political accountability. Furthermore, Bahrain has a history of discriminatory and repressive policies toward the majority Shiite population. On several occasions since the 1970s, tensions in Bahrain have boiled over into widespread protests over government repression. These were met with violence from state security forces. The government has on occasion, promised limited democratic reforms to address protesters' concerns. However, these reforms were often merely cosmetic changes. The ruling family's power remained unchanged in reality.

Bahrain has, for decades, maintained a strategic relationship with the United States. The country became the site of a small U.S. naval presence following World War II. After Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the United States enlarged its presence in Bahrain. The United States did so by reestablishing and basing the U.S. Navy's [Fifth Fleet](#) there. In 2002, the George W. Bush administration designated Bahrain a [major non-NATO ally](#). This status entailed certain military benefits for Bahrain. These benefits included participation in military-related research and development and special financing for the purchase of U.S. military equipment. In 2004, the United States and Bahrain signed a [free trade agreement](#) that expanded commercial relations between the countries.

Renewed unrest in Bahrain began on February 14, 2011. On this day, government forces shot at and beat peaceful protesters. Inspired by the successful uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia in the previous months, the demonstrators, generally Shias but also Sunnis, believed the moment was opportune to demand a more democratic society. The government's attempts to quash the uprising proved counterproductive because its use of force hardened the opposition's call for an end to monarchy. On February 17, security forces raided a protest camp. This resulted in the killing of several protesters and injuring hundreds more. When protests intensified in March 2011, the ruling family appealed to its allied neighbors for help. In response, the governments of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates dispatched two thousand troops to Manama to help the Bahraini government put down the protests and reestablish order.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates acted to support Bahrain for two reasons. First, as fellow nondemocratic monarchies, they feared that the same popular movements that brought down Egyptian and Tunisian dictators could spread and endanger their own holds on power. Second, they believed that the mostly Shiite uprising in Bahrain was incited by Iran—a large, non-Arab, predominantly Shiite country and rival of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and their allies. The Bahraini government argued that Iran, which until 1970 claimed Bahrain as part of its territory, was attempting to undermine the monarchy. In February 2013, Bahraini officials arrested eight people taking part in anti-government protests and alleged that these individuals had links to Iran.

Following the initial uprising, King Hamad formed the [Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry](#) (BICI) to investigate the government crackdown that began in response to the February 14 protests. The commission's five-hundred-page report found evidence of excessive force and torture. It concluded that Bahraini authorities had caused the deaths of protesters. It further dismissed accusations of Iranian involvement, claiming the Bahraini government failed to provide evidence that proved its allegations. The commission made twenty-six recommendations to the government to ensure that such a crackdown would not happen again. Bahrain and other states welcomed the report. However, critics expressed concern that its recommendations did not specifically address ways to resolve the underlying political crisis. Bahrain's government agreed to adhere to the report's recommendations but ultimately implemented only a [handful of them](#) [PDF].

In 2012, reports of government-supported raids on Shiite mosques and villages made achieving a political resolution to the crisis more difficult. An upsurge in violence took place in mid-2012, when the government proceeded with plans to host a Formula 1 race. Bahraini officials had previously used this event to showcase the country as modern and progressive. Opposition groups took advantage of the large contingent of international news agencies present for the racing event by staging demonstrations before and during the race. This sparked clashes with Bahraini authorities.

In the following years, reports of arbitrary detention and torture continued to surface. Bahraini authorities [arrested hundreds](#) of opposition members on charges of militancy, often conducting raids in largely Shiite communities. Bahraini courts frequently jailed [dissidents](#) or, in some cases, [revoked their citizenship](#).

Unrest continued to flare up throughout 2013. Renewed demonstrations frequently met a harsh police response. Several bomb attacks occurred over the course of the year, [killing three Bahraini police officers](#). Opposition groups condemned those attacks. Bahraini authorities accused Iran-linked [terrorist](#) groups of carrying them out. Although the government called for a renewed national dialogue at the beginning of the year, Bahrain's main opposition group later decided to withdraw from the talks after one of its ranking members was arrested on [charges of inciting terrorism](#). As the country approached the third anniversary of its initial uprising, simmering tensions threatened to boil over at any moment.

Bahrain's repression of opposition groups and protesters drew sharp international criticism from governments, international organizations, and human rights groups. In March 2011, then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon strongly criticized the Bahraini government for what [his spokesman called](#) the "excessive and indiscriminate use of force by the security forces and police in Bahrain against unarmed civilians, including, allegedly, against medical personnel." Similarly, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights [expressed disappointment](#) at Bahrain's treatment of opposition groups. It also criticized the lack of meaningful reform and progress in Bahrain since the beginning of the uprising. The United States also voiced criticism of Bahrain's repressive measures and called for restraint. The United States also encouraged dialogue between the government and opposition groups. Still, international pressure on Bahrain to improve its treatment of its citizens was ultimately limited. Furthermore, the country faced few real consequences for its continued violations of human rights.

Role of the UN Security Council

Bahrain's repression of human rights activists and political opposition groups posed a potential risk to international peace and security. Bahrain's unrest and repression were fueled by a regional rivalry. This rivalry between predominantly Sunni Saudi Arabia and predominantly Shiite Iran. Officials in Manama and the Saudi capital Riyadh have repeatedly claimed that Iran has had a hand in outbreaks of unrest in Bahrain. However, they have presented no evidence to support this. The perception of a threat from Iran was one reason why Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates sent troops to Bahrain during the 2011 uprising. The Saudis saw Bahrain as a potential launching point for an Iranian effort to stir up discontent in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. This area is home to a large Shiite population and most of the country's known oil reserves. Opposition groups, meanwhile, frequently condemned foreign involvement as an "occupation." In light of ongoing tensions among the United States, Iran, and other Persian Gulf countries, renewed violence in Bahrain risked becoming a flash point. Ongoing violence in Bahrain could incite a greater regional conflict. According to the UN Charter, the UN Security Council has a duty to investigate and act on any dispute or situation that could lead to international friction. As a result, the UN Security Council had good reasons to consider taking action on Bahrain.

The UN Security Council has taken action to protect civilian populations from violence on several occasions in the past, including in Libya in 2011. The Bahraini government's use of force to quell protests and the arbitrary imprisonment, torture, and use of the death penalty for human rights activists and political opposition violated several articles in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR). In addition, those acts violated several human rights treaties that Bahrain had previously signed. Although the UN Security Council is not formally charged with enforcing treaty obligations or articles in the UDHR, ignoring the situation in Bahrain risked being seen as a signal of uneven international commitment to upholding human rights.

However, taking action on Bahrain could hurt other [multilateral](#) efforts. Several other issues in the Middle East occupied the Security Council's agenda in 2014, including violence in Syria, terrorism by the self-proclaimed Islamic State and other groups in the region, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Iranian nuclear development. To achieve peaceful resolutions to these pressing issues, the UN Security Council had to rely on cooperation with multilateral efforts from Middle Eastern countries. This included Bahrain and its allies in the Gulf. Intervention against Bahraini repression therefore risked harming future efforts at international cooperation.

Members of the Security Council had to assess the situation. They had to determine whether it warranted a response. Some countries were likely to see the Bahraini government's behavior as a crackdown that violated the human rights of its Shiite citizens. Others characterized this behavior as a sovereign country's reasonable effort to keep order. Moreover, many of the UN Security Council's [veto](#)-wielding permanent member states had longstanding, close economic and military interests in Bahrain. These relationships had the potential to hinder any UN Security Council action toward Bahrain. The United States, China, France, and the United Kingdom all had strong trade relationships with Bahrain and had economic interests in the region due to its rich supply of oil. The United States maintained a major naval base in Bahrain. Furthermore, the United States regarded the country as an important foothold for its interests in the Middle East. Supporting aggressive measures against Bahrain to encourage democratic reforms could therefore go against council members' economic, political, and military interests. Considering these conflicting interests, UN Security Council members had to carefully consider whether and how they should take action to put meaningful pressure on Bahrain.

UN Security Members could consider the following options:

Preparation and Role-Play

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[Instructions](#)

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 the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case threaten your country’s national security?
- What national interests are at stake? How should they be prioritized?
- What is the nature of the relationship between your country and Bahrain? 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 the situation such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United States and the United Kingdom in the situation in Bahrain? How might these countries be contributing to tensions and how might they help resolve them?

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 the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case threaten your country's national security?
- What national interests are at stake in this crisis? How should they be prioritized?
- What is the nature of the relationship between your country and Bahrain? 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 the situation such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United States and the United Kingdom in the situation in Bahrain? How might these countries be contributing to tensions and how might they help resolve them?

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 the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case 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 is the nature of the relationship between the United Nations and Bahrain? How does this inform potential UN action in this case?
- 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 the situation with Bahrain? How, if at all, might they affect the current situation?

Nonmember State or Observer

In certain cases, nonmember states or nonmember observers of the United Nations are invited to take part in Security Council deliberations. Nonmember states and observers may participate in UN Security Council debate, but they may not vote. Because they are often invited because of either their proximity to or expertise on the issue, representatives of nonmember states or observers may be asked to answer questions and provide background information to the council.

A nonmember state or observer representative's goals are to

- promote their government's interests and values at the United Nations, specifically by making speeches and asking questions; and
- when applicable, provide complete, accurate, and up-to-date information or insight on the situation under discussion.

Issues for Consideration

- How does the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case threaten your country's national security?
- What national interests are at stake in this crisis? How should they be prioritized?
- What is the nature of the relationship between your country and Bahrain? 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 the situation in Bahrain?

Guide to the Memorandum

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	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	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	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

The Debrief

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.

What Actually Happened

Despite continuing tension between government forces and the opposition, the UN Security Council ultimately did not consider taking action to address the unrest in Bahrain. Several countries have continued to fortify their commercial and military relationships with Bahrain despite its human rights record. The United States has prioritized efforts to combat terrorism and curtail Iranian influence in the region over the promotion of reforms in the country. As part of this relationship, the United States has sold military equipment to Bahrain's security services. The United Kingdom also has a notable military relationship with Bahrain that includes a bilateral defense agreement and arms sales. In recent years, the United Kingdom has fortified its military ties to Bahrain, opening a naval base in the country in 2018.

Escalating tensions in the Middle East among the United States, Iran, and several other Persian Gulf countries have led to increased international cooperation with Bahrain. These countries aim to protect international oil shipping lanes in the Persian Gulf. In April 2019, Iran threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial chokepoint separating the Persian Gulf from the Indian Ocean. That summer, Iranian forces and proxies conducted a series of attacks on commercial tankers and oil facilities in the Strait of Hormuz and Saudi Arabia. In response, several countries joined the United States, Bahrain, and the United Kingdom to form a joint maritime security initiative. This force was headquartered in Manama, to protect shipping lanes in the Persian Gulf. Common opposition to Iran has also driven Israel to build closer ties with Bahrain. Once long-standing rivals of Israel, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates signed on to the Abraham Accords in September 2020. This normalized their diplomatic relations with the country.

Meanwhile, ongoing tension between the government and opposition continued. Repression and violence in Bahrain have intensified. The government has engaged in the arrest and jailing of activists, extrajudicial killings, and revocations of citizenship. The United Nations has heavily criticized the country's practices and called for Bahrain to observe international human rights laws. So far international pressure on Bahrain to improve its treatment of citizens has remained limited. The country has faced few consequences for its continued violation of human rights.

Bahrain will likely remain an international diplomatic challenge for years to come. Impediments to a forceful international response will likely remain. This is especially likely as the United States and United Kingdom deepen their relationship with Bahrain. Still, the UN Security Council could prove instrumental in leading an international response to renewed unrest in

Bahrain.

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.

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 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

- [“Unrest in Bahrain Case Study,”](#) YouTube video, 2:42, posted by CFR Education, November 14, 2016.
- [“What are Economic Sanctions?”](#) CFR Education, May 12, 2023.
- Kelly McEvers, [“Bahrain: The Revolution that Wasn’t,”](#) NPR, January 5, 2012.
- Doug Palmer, Christopher Wilson, and Paul Simao, [“U.S. Requests Talks With Bahrain Over 2011 Labor Crackdown,”](#) Reuters, May 7, 2013.
- [“Factbox: U.S. Navy’s Fifth Fleet, Based in Bahrain,”](#) Reuters, February 17, 2011.
- Bilal Y. Saab, [“Relocating the Fifth Fleet?”](#) American Interest, August 22, 2018.
- Elliott Abrams, [“Bahrain: ‘Insulting a Public Institution’ Means Prison,”](#) CFR.org, January 21, 2015.
- Alison Meuse, [“Human Rights Activists Warn of Worsening Situation in Bahrain,”](#) NPR, June 6, 2017.
- [“Bahrain Human Rights Deteriorate as World Looks Away: Activists,”](#) Reuters, January 25, 2018.
- Eliot Abrams, [“Can Bahrain be Saved?”](#) Council on Foreign Relations, February 21, 2018.
- Stephany Nebehay, [“UN Rights Experts Tell Bahrain to Halt Crackdown on Activists and Free Speech,”](#) Reuters, July 26, 2018.
- [YOUTUBE PLAYLIST](#)

Additional Resources

- [Amnesty](#) International, [“Bahrain: Reform Shelved, Repression Unleashed,”](#) November 2012.
- Kelly McEvers, [“The Crackdown,”](#) Washington Monthly, March/April 2012.
- Tim Arango, [“Shiites in Iraq Support Bahrain’s Protestors,”](#) New York Times, April 1, 2011.
- Ted Regencia and Alia Chughtai, [“What’s at Stake if Trading at Strait of Hormuz is Disrupted?”](#) Al Jazeera, July 5, 2018.
- [“Oil’s Trouble Spots,”](#) CFR.org, January 20, 2012.
- Chris Johnston and agencies, [“Britain to Build First Permanent Middle East Military Base in Four Decades,”](#) Guardian, December 6, 2014.
- Reza Aslan, [“Bahrain’s Fake Sectarian War,”](#) Foreign Affairs, June 30, 2013.

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).

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.

How to Write a Presidential Statement

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.

Unrest in Bahrain in 2014 (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

Set in August, 2014. In the small island country of Bahrain, government and security forces have clashed with protestors seeking democratic reform. The ruling [al-Khalifa](#) family has responded to these protests with force and mass arrests. The most recent clashes between government forces and protestors are not the first but certainly the bloodiest. In February 2011, Bahraini activists, inspired by uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, gathered in the capital to seek political reform. The fact that Bahrain's leaders are part of the Sunni minority and the demonstrators represent the Shiite majority gives the uprising a [sectarian](#) complexion, in addition to the broader social issues of disenfranchisement and limited economic opportunity. The UN Secretary-General has called a meeting of the UN Security Council to assess whether the situation warrants a response and, if so, what kind.

Decision Point

Three years after Bahrain's 2011 uprising, progress toward reform has stalled. In January 2014, the government suspended its "national dialogue" with opposition groups. The government blamed opposition groups for the breakdown. Soon after, renewed unrest gripped the country. On February 14—the anniversary of the initial uprising—thousands of protestors calling for King Hamad's ouster gathered in Bahrain's capital, Manama. The protestors met stiff resistance from security forces. This resulted in several injuries and dozens of arrests. Outside the capital, a bomb struck a police bus in a Shiite village, killing one police officer. Three more officers were killed by another bomb weeks later. Although mainstream opposition groups denied any connection to the bombings and condemned the acts, the attacks only amplified an already severe crackdown by Bahrain's security forces. This crackdown was especially focused on predominantly Shiite areas. Activists, along with international human rights organizations, are calling for an international response. In this context, the UN Secretary-General has called a meeting of the UN Security Council. The Council will assess whether the situation warrants a response and, if so, what kind.

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 potential consequences of instability in Bahrain related to international peace and security.
- Students will consider how the UN Security Council should balance a desire to support democratic reforms with a need to win the support of Security Council members who have strategic interests in Bahrain.
- Students will evaluate the options available to the UN Security Council to put meaningful pressure on Bahrain for democratic reforms.

Concepts and Issues

Concepts

- Interests versus values
- Sectarianism
- Human rights
- Political reform
- Dispute resolution
- [Alliances](#)

Issues

- Free flow of energy resources in the Middle East
- Bahraini political and religious dynamics
- International military and economic presence in the Persian Gulf region
- Promotion of Human rights and democratic [governance](#)

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.

Members of the Security Council need to assess the situation and determine whether it warrants a response. Some countries are likely to see the Bahraini government's behavior as a crackdown that violates the human rights of its Shiite citizens. Others could see this behavior as a sovereign country's reasonable effort to keep order. Moreover, many of the UN Security Council's [veto](#)-wielding permanent member states have close economic ties and military interests in Bahrain. These relationships have the potential to hinder any UN Security Council action toward Bahrain. The United States, China, France, and the United Kingdom frequently trade with Bahrain and have various economic interests in the region due to its rich supply of oil. The United States and the United Kingdom both maintain naval bases in Bahrain and regard the country as an important foothold for their interests in the Middle East. Supporting aggressive measures against Bahrain to encourage democratic reforms could therefore go against council members' economic, political, and military interests. Considering these conflicting interests, UN Security Council members will need to carefully consider whether and how they should take action to put meaningful pressure on Bahrain.

The principal policy options available in this case are discussed below. These responses are available individually, in combination, or all together.

Call for All-Inclusive National Dialogue Between the Bahraini Government and Political Opposition Groups

The UN Security Council could direct Bahraini government officials and leaders from political opposition groups, human rights organizations, and Shiite communities to conduct a peaceful dialogue to discuss implementing democratic reforms in the country and curbing the use of state force to subdue opposition. This dialogue could take place under the auspices of the UN secretary-general or be mediated by an outside organization.

This option is the least ambitious but the least likely to be controversial among permanent council members, as it likely would not damage relationships or agreements between Bahrain and member states. If successful, a national dialogue could promote peaceful conflict resolution, and allowing political opposition members a forum for discussion could potentially ease political unrest. However, there is no guarantee that either side will respond to requests for a dialogue or accept outside mediation. Even if negotiations can be arranged, this option has no way to assure or enforce any political changes in Bahrain. If either party refuses or negotiations fail, further conflict could result, and the UN Security Council could face criticism for not acting strongly enough.

Call for an Investigation of the Bahraini Government's Suppression of the Political Opposition and Activists

The UN Security Council could pass a resolution calling on Bahrain to admit inspectors to monitor the political situation and Bahrain's human rights practices. This option could provide legitimate, independent insight into the extent of Bahrain's human rights abuses and undemocratic actions as well as Iran's alleged involvement in Bahrain's political unrest. An independent investigation could conclude with recommendations to improve Bahrain's human rights practices, outline a timeline for reevaluation, and establish consequences, such as [sanctions](#), should Bahrain fail to adopt reforms. International human rights organizations have previously criticized the BICI report and investigation of the events that took place in Bahrain in 2011. Freedom of the press is limited in Bahrain, underscoring the need for an international organization to investigate claims of human rights abuses and undemocratic practices. If Bahrain allows independent inspectors into the country under the auspices of the United Nations, they could have greater access to information than previous investigations.

However, requesting access from the Bahraini government could prove challenging. Security Council members would need to secure Bahrain's consent to allow UN inspectors into the country. Bahrain's government has routinely refused to allow independent investigators into the country, including UN special rapporteurs (experts appointed by the UN Human Rights Council). However, a Security Council resolution calling for an investigation could bear more weight than requests from other organs of the United Nations. Council members could also consider backing up their request for an inspection with threats of sanctions should Bahrain refuse, although this could be met with resistance from Security Council members with close ties to Bahrain.

Enact Sanctions on Bahrain

The UN Security Council could enact sanctions on Bahrain in an attempt to coerce Bahrain's government to cease its crackdown against protests and negotiate with opposition groups to implement certain reforms. These sanctions could be targeted against individuals in the Bahraini government or take the form of broader restrictions, potentially on the trade of luxury goods and manufacturing materials. Security Council members could also call for a halt on international arms sales to the country. Since 2011, Bahrain has ignored or deflected calls from the United Nations to enact democratic reforms and end the use of force to suppress the political opposition. Sanctions would ensure that Bahrain faces consequences for ignoring the international outcry against it and could put significant pressure on Bahrain to change its behavior. Sanctions could also set a forceful example to other countries that violating international human rights treaties will bear consequences.

However, garnering the support needed to pass sanctions would be difficult. Given the strategic military relationships that both the United States and the United Kingdom have with Bahrain, their support would be unlikely. Other permanent council members, such as China and Russia, could see Bahrain's actions as a legitimate exercise of state [sovereignty](#) and be reticent to support forceful action. Due to the veto power of each of these permanent council members, the chances of gaining the required consensus to approve sanctions are low.

Do Nothing

The Security Council could decide it is unable to take meaningful action on the dispute in light of conflicting interests among council members. In this case, the UN Security Council could adopt a statement expressing concern about violent crackdowns on protests, the lack of freedom of expression and free press, and the use of torture, mass arrests, state harassment, intimidation, revocation of citizenship, disenfranchisement, executions, and the lack of due process for political opposition and activists. Such a statement could show support for Bahraini opposition groups and draw international attention to the issue. Increasing international attention could help pressure the Bahraini government into adopting reform. If the situation worsens, council members could also revisit the matter. However, inaction on this issue could draw criticism from human rights groups. Especially given the council's willingness to approve a military intervention in Libya in 2011, remaining silent on Bahrain could be seen as upholding a double standard when council members' interests are involved and erode confidence in future Security Council action.

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.

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	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	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	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

To add spice or challenge to the role-play, partway through the discussion throw in one of the following flashpoints—additional hypothetical developments that fit within the case’s existing decision point—or create your own.

1. In response to international and domestic outcries against excessive use of force, harsh sentencing and reports of abuse in prison against members of the opposition, King Hamad bin Isa [al-Khalifa](#) announces plans for an independent commission to investigate the Bahraini criminal justice system and recommend potential reforms. Details on the organizers of the independent investigation have not been released. Leaders of the Bahraini opposition have expressed their concerns about the legitimacy and transparency of this independent commission.
2. Reports emerge that a Bahraini court has overturned Bahrain’s previous decision to dissolve al Wefaq. King Hamad claims this decision to be “a step towards unification and reform.” The opposition claims his decision as a tool to divert international criticism. Some analysts have raised concerns that the decision could spark violent backlash from the opposition.
3. In a blistering speech, a prominent Iranian cleric castigates the Bahraini monarchy for what he calls its “long-standing subjugation and cold-blooded murder of our Shia brothers and sisters.” According to Iranian media, the cleric is speaking with the support of Iran’s senior leadership. He calls for the Iranian government to take action in support of Bahraini Shias, using force if necessary. Bahraini leaders quickly condemn the speech and raise the alert status of their security forces. The principal Bahraini opposition figures do not immediately react.

After introducing a flashpoint, you might want to help students refocus their discussion by considering critical questions such as these:

1. Who is affected by this event or development, and how?
2. Is there any uncertainty about what has taken place? How credible is the report?
3. Does this event or development affect the feasibility of any policy options? If so, how?

4. Does this event or development affect the desirability of any policy options? If so, how?

Case Assessment

1. What is the situation in Bahrain as presented in this case, how could it threaten international peace and stability?
2. Why are the Bahraini activists dissatisfied with the [al-Khalifa](#) regime and what are their demands?
3. How has the Bahraini government responded to popular unrest? What have been the consequences of the government's actions?
4. What are the permanent members of the UN Security Council's interests in Bahrain that could deter UN Security Council intervention? How can the individual interests of permanent members lead to UN Security Council inaction?

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](#)