



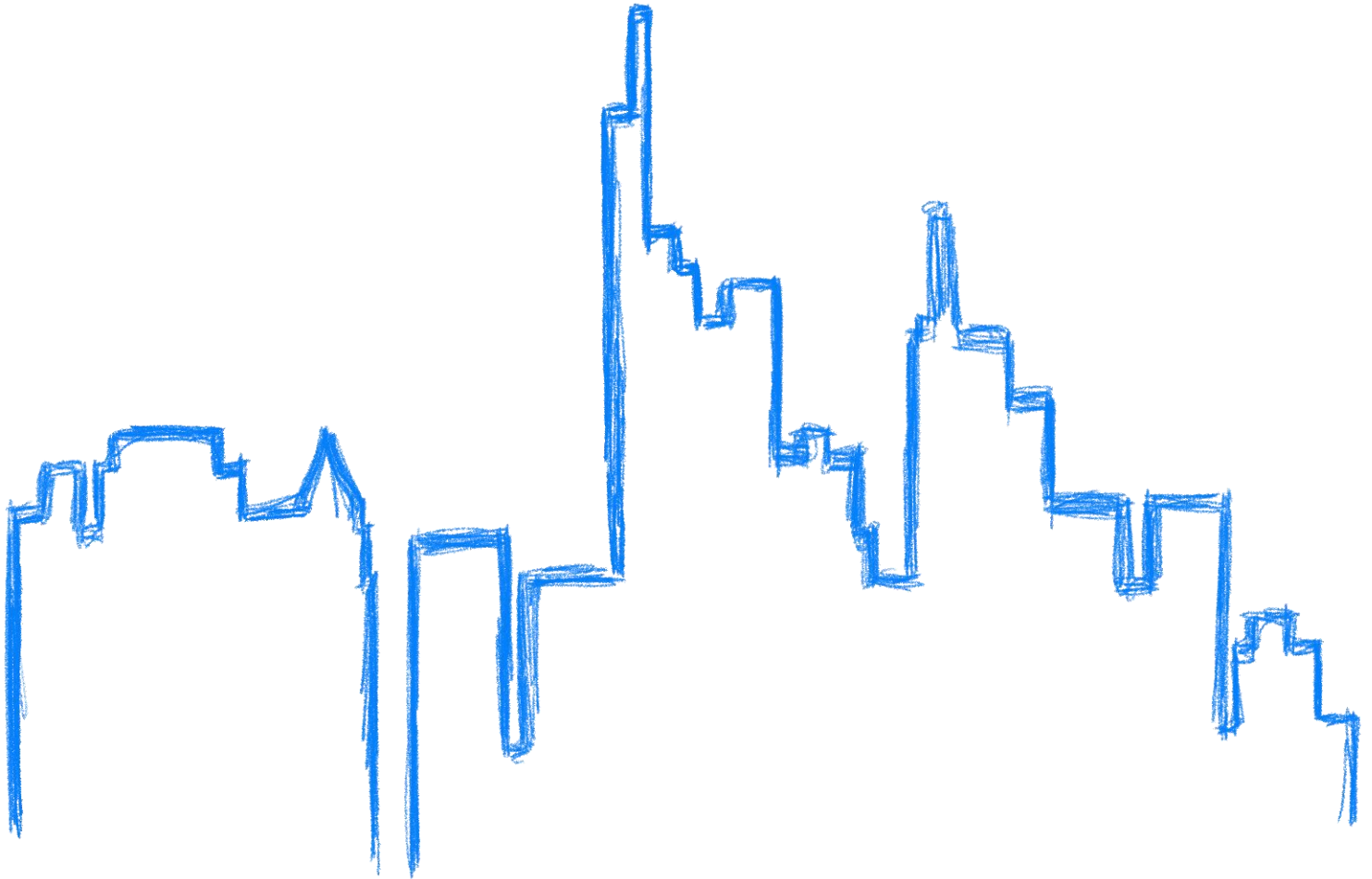
Main Model United Nations Conference

Frankfurt am Main, Germany

16th Session

5th to 7th of March 2021

Conflicts, Concerns, Cooperation - a Coup of Conventional Politics



Background Guide

United Nations Security Council

Topic I: The Use of Natural Resources as Weapons in Conflict Situations

Topic II: De-escalating Tensions at the Persian Gulf

Honourable Delegates,

We, in the name of the entire team, welcome you all warmly to the 16th Edition of the MainMUN conference. We, Julian Beck and Ann Katrin Korb, will be your Chairs for the upcoming days and therefore, we would like to use the opportunity to introduce ourselves.

Hello, my name is Julian and my MUN story began in 2018 when I first attended MainMUN as a delegate to prepare myself for the NMUN conference in New York. Since then, I became part of the great MainMUN team and chaired the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) committee and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) . At my second time at NMUN, I represented Russia in the Security Council for which I am looking forward to experience it from the Chair perspective. I am studying in the BSc programme at the Frankfurt School of Finance and Management with focus on Management, Philosophy and Economics.

I am Ann Katrin and have been part of MainMUN for 6 years now since a friend dragged me to one of the team meetings because “[I] like organising and discussions”. Obviously, I haven’t left since. When I am not busy attending national and international MUNs, either as delegate, chair or part of the press, I am studying American Studies in the Goethe University’s Master programme or working in online sales and marketing. As I have now filled every possible position one can have in the MainMUN organising team, it felt only natural to chair a committee again this year, so I am looking forward to it once again.

The topics to discuss at the MainMUN 2021 Security Council will be:

- The Use of Natural Resources as Weapons in Conflict Situations
- De-escalating Tension in the Persian Gulf

The topics will be presented on the following pages and we will be able to get into the topics with some optional guiding questions.

We at MainMUN do not require position papers but we strongly advise to write them. Our own experience has shown that delegates who take the time to write position papers tend to be more prepared than those who do not. If you write a position paper and hand it in before the deadline, you will also receive feedback from us which provides a unique opportunity to feel confident in your preparation.

Be aware that this Background Guide provides you with just basic information on the topics and you are required to further inform yourself on the topics and your country's position (on the topics as well as your country's policies as whole). As the system of an interconnected crisis can always take sharp turns, you need to be well prepared to represent your state in a diplomatic manner and you should also be prepared on the topics of the other committees if you are your country's head of delegation, as your fellow country delegation members might need feedback or support from you.

Delegates should keep in mind that while we take diplomatic conduct very serious at MainMUN 2021, the conference is also a simulation. Please be courteous to your fellow delegates at all time, even if you do not agree with their country's policies and try to also interact with delegates of member states which are important to your own, even if they are not represented by your friends. MUNs are a great place to form new friendships, which we have both experienced in the past, and we hope you get to experience this as well. Do not forget to lobby for your ideas in the committee and outside, as our experience shows that the best deals are made over food and coffee.

The MainMUN 2021 Security Council (SC) will observe the standard MainMUN Rules of Procedure for the committee work. In addition, the Security Council will also follow a certain set of rules specific to the SC. The delegates who are their country's head of delegation will also be able to write directives and get involved in the crisis. Therefore, they will need to look at the crisis handbook as well. You will be provided those rules separately and will also be able to download them from our website.

If you have any remaining questions regarding the committee, feel free to contact us via the MyMUN committee chat or later in the process via Ryver.

We are looking forward to the conference. We are excited to meet you all and we expect very interesting and fruitful debates.

With best regards,

Julian Beck &

Ann Katrin Korb



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1. The United Nations Security Council

The UNSC is the primary body to maintain international peace and security. Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorisation of military action through Security Council resolutions; it is the only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions to member states.

2.1 History

After the effects of World War II and the failure of the League of Nations, the United Nations (UN) were established as an intergovernmental organisation to maintain peace and security. In turn, the UNSC was created with the responsibility to maintain those principles.¹ The first session of the UNSC was held on 17 January 1946 at Church House in London, England. Later however, the UNSC received its permanent domicile at the UN Headquarters in New York. Until 1965, the Security Council was comprised of five permanent and six non-permanent members. It was after 1965 that the number of non-permanent members was increased to ten.²

During the Cold War, the UNSC, due to the disagreements between the United States of America and the former Soviet Union, was quite ineffective and the permanent members made frequent use of their veto power to prevent certain resolutions from passing. The late 1980's, however, were marked by an effective Security Council, which authorised peacekeeping missions in different countries, such as the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kosovo, and East Timor. Since the end of the Cold War, the Council has adopted significantly more resolutions by consensus than during the Cold War.³

2.2 Competencies

The UNSC is the only body that has the power to adopt binding resolutions. When a resolution is adopted, the member states, in accordance with Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations (1945), must accept the Council's decision.

¹ United Nations (1945): UN Security Council, What is the Security Council? Article 1 in Charter of the United Nations.

² Bourantonis, D. (2005). The History and Politics of UN Security Council Reform. New York: Routledge.

³ Encyclopedia Britannica. (2014): United Nations Security Council. Retrieved from: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/532070/United-Nations-Security-Council> (6 January 2019).

The mandate of the SC is to maintain international peace and security and to take measures whenever those are threatened. The Council's authority is particularly relevant with respect to the UN's four primary purposes, as specified in the Charter of the United Nations (1945): maintaining international peace and security; developing friendly relations among nations; cooperating in solving international problems; promoting respect for human rights as well as being a center for harmonising the actions of nations. In order to prevent the escalation of a given conflict, the Council may call upon the parties to comply with provisional measures. The Council also cooperates with a number of international and regional organisations, as well as non-governmental organisations to gather knowledge and implement its decisions.

2.3 Operation

The Charter of the United Nations (1945) lays out the Council's specific powers and responsibilities: First of all, the Council is allowed to call its members to apply sanctions and other measures. Sanctions can, among others, consist of economic and financial penalties, restrictions on travel or the cancellation of diplomatic relations. Furthermore, the Council has the mandate to investigate any dispute which may lead to aggression between two parties, such as states, other non-state groups or within national territories. Finally, the Council can decide on military action against any international peace- or security-threatening situation, and - where needed - is allowed to further decide on the deployment of troops or observers. Whether a situation endangers peace or security is determined by the Council.

2.4 Special Rules of the Security Council

The right to veto decisions is one of the special rules applied in the SC and sets it apart from the other main bodies of the United Nations. The following rules, additional to the rules mentioned in the MainMUN Rules of Procedure Guide, will be applied in the SC only.

2.4.1 Minimum Majority and Veto Power

Each member of the SC has one vote. Votes on all matters require a majority of nine member states, with the concurrent support or abstention of all permanent members in substantial matters. If one of the five permanent members votes against a matter of substance, such as a draft resolution, it is "vetoed" and does not pass. The five permanent members were granted a

special status in the Security Council. Each of them is allowed to the right of veto at any time. In accordance with Article 27 of the Charter of the United Nations, “decisions on procedural matters shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members“.

Decisions of all other matters shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members including the concurring votes of the permanent members. If a permanent member does not fully agree with a proposed resolution, but does not want to veto, it may choose to abstain. The resolution can be adopted, if the required number of nine favorable votes are given.

2.4.1 Declare a Vote Substantial

This is a motion which may only be used by the permanent members of the Security Council. It may be entertained on any procedural motion. The aim of this motion is to change the required vote on the procedural motion into a substantial vote. On a substantial vote, all delegates who are ‘present’ may abstain, and, even more important, the required majority for that motion to pass is nine including all permanent members.

Chair: “Are there any points or motions on the floor? N-P5 state, to what point do you rise?”

N-P5 State: “Distinguished chair, we/the Republic of... move(s) to suspend the meeting for the purpose of a caucus for five minutes.”

Chair: “Thank you, this motion is in order at this time. Are there any further motions on the floor? P5 state to what point do you rise?”

P5 state: “Honourable Chair, fellow delegates, we/the Republic of... move(s) to declare the motion to suspend the meeting substantial.”

Chair: “This is in order at this time. Is there any opposition to this motion?” (Several placards are raised) “Seeing objections, we will now have to vote upon re-declaring this motion procedural. All those in favor of re-declaring, please raise your placards now.” (12 placards are raised) “Thank you. All those against?” (The P5 state which originally declared the motion substantial raises its placard) “Abstentions?” (Two placards are raised) “Due to the veto of a permanent member state, the motion to re-declare the motion [for suspending the meeting] procedural fails. We will now vote substantially upon suspending the meeting. All those in favor, please raise your placards.” (13 placards are raised) “Against?” (Again, the P5 state which originally declared the motion substantial raises its placard) “Abstention?” (One placard

is raised). Due to the veto of a permanent member, this motion fails. We will continue with the formal session.

2.4.3 Status of Observers

A non-Council member (observer) is given debating rights. This will allow the delegation to be recognised by the Chair during debate and proposing motions to the floor or vote upon procedural matters. Observers cannot vote on substantial matters and submitting draft resolutions or amendments is prohibited. Observers can be UN members whose interests are directly affected, or non-members of the UN and experts, who are invited to the UNSC.

2.4.4 Explanation of a Vote

You are allowed to explain your vote after a roll call vote, when you say “no, with rights” or “yes with rights”. The explanation should be kept rather short, as you will have only a short time to realise it. You may only explain your vote if you vote against a draft resolution or abstain from a vote. Furthermore, you need to remain in diplomatic conduct at all times. Reasons for an explanation of vote can only refer to your country’s position, personal reasons are not allowed. With voting clause by clause and divisions of the question, it is quite easy to vote in favor only on specific parts of the resolution. To prevent the confusion of your colleagues, if you vote against the resolution in a particular case, it might be necessary to explain your vote to the committee. On the other hand, there is of course also a possibility to make a final point about the resolution as a whole, but you should be mindful that the chairs will realise if you try to abuse such an explanation.

2. Topic A: The Use of Natural Resources as Weapons in Conflict Situations

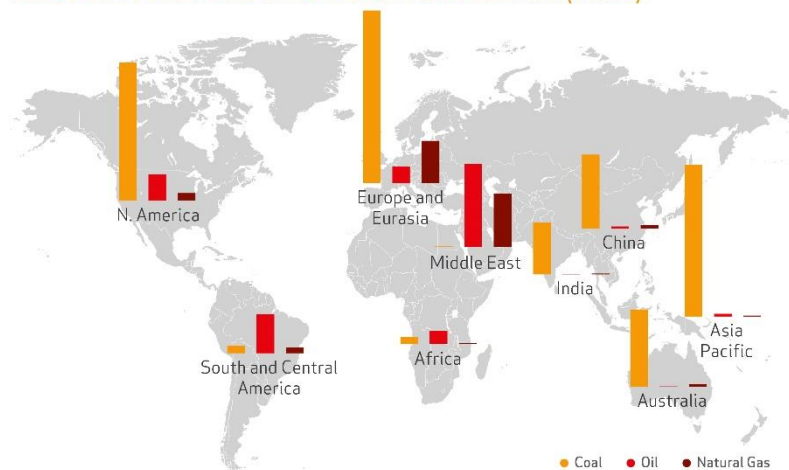
3.1 Introduction

Humans are dependent on the planet they live on. We receive our food and water which we need to survive from earth and, as humanity has evolved, we have become more dependent on other resources as well. Transit needs oil to run, houses are often heated by burning oil, gas, coal or wood, technology is heavily dependent on metals, and a variety of different industries needs natural stones for their productions. The list of human needs is almost endless.

However, all natural resources are finite. While there are some options now to reproduce certain things in laboratories, like diamonds, others cannot be replicated.

⁴ It takes millions of years to turn fossils into oil, but humankind has not taken that long

Location of the world's main fossil fuel reserves (Mtoe)



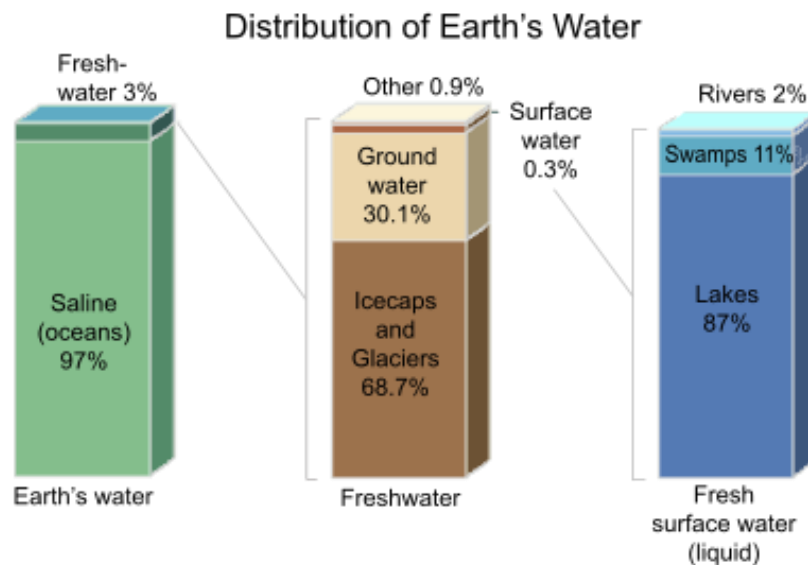
Source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2018 (WCA Analysis)

to almost deplete earth's oil reserves. As we are dependent on it heavily, it has become an important part of world trade and therefore also proves to be a valid asset in warfare. This gives great advantage to those nations who are rich in fossil fuels but also makes them vulnerable to

attacks from outside. The distribution of fossil fuel reserves is uneven around the globe, however, the same is valid for other resources like metals, stones and minerals. In general, less stable infrastructures are more vulnerable to exploitation via foreign actors in each nation. But there are other resources one should look at such as water.

⁴ World Coal: Location of the world's main fossil fuel reserves. Retrieved from: <https://www.worldcoal.org/coal/where-coal-found> (3 January 2021).

Fresh water only makes up a small percentage of the world's water supply and while there are options to desalinate salt water, it would not be enough to supply the world's population with enough fresh water today.⁵



As climate changes and temperatures rise, droughts become more frequent and our freshwater reserves are slowly depleting. In addition, the human population is constantly rising. Thus, it is not unlikely that future wars will be fought over the access to fresh water.

Illegal logging and mining often mean the loss of biodiversity and support climate change.⁶ In turn climate change promotes wildfires as we have seen in 2020 in Australia and California as summers become drier, resulting in huge losses of forests. In addition, this often “creates social conflict with Indigenous and local populations and leads to violence, crime and human rights abuses”.⁷ Lastly, deforestation promotes the extinction of those plant and animal species which were once living in those forests.⁸

To conclude, natural resources come in a variety of forms but so also do the problems and conflicts about them. Their role in national and international conflicts should not be overlooked.

3.2 History

3.2.1 Former conflicts

The Russian Federation has used their own natural resources as weapons repeatedly in the past. The building of gas pipeline into Europe was not just an economic decision for easy supply and trade, but also provided Russia with an option to negotiate with Europe.⁹ The threat of cutting

⁵ Penn State's College of Earth and Mineral Sciences' OER Initiative: *Distribution of Water on the Earth's Surface*. Retrieved from: <https://www.e-education.psu.edu/earth103/node/701> (20 December 2020).

⁶ Greenpeace Australia: Fighting against deforestation and illegal logging. Retrieved from: <https://www.greenpeace.org.au/what-we-do/protecting-forests/threats/> (3 January 2021).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The Washington Examiner (2017): *Weaponized Gas*. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/weekly-standard/weaponized-gas> (20 December 2020).

off the supply of gas was often enough to sway the discussion in Russia's favor. If the buying nation would not want to pay Russia's price, financially or politically, they would simply shut off the gas supply. Ukraine was one of the countries experiencing this in 2006 when Gazprom, the Russian gas supplier, shut off their stream on January 1st after Ukraine denied paying increased prices.¹⁰ The same scenario repeated itself in 2009.¹¹ The annexation of Crimea was also heavily influenced by oil and gas reserves in the region as it gave Russia access to larger portions of the Black Sea.¹² Russia's influence in the gas market has significantly dropped due to the United States' involvement in fracking which provides alternative means of gas supply to the buying nations.

ISIS has used the dry climate of Iraq to its advantage. By taking over regions important for the critical infrastructure of the nation they were able to control the population via access to natural resources. By targeting dams ISIS was able to limit Baghdad's access to electricity, which is produced largely by hydroelectric plants.¹³ Droughts were putting an additional strain on the generation of power as less water means slower flow rates and therefore less electricity.

Mining of minerals and metals, such as gold and phosphorus has created large conflicts in many states on the African continent. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the war is not fought over the resources but conflict was already in place and now has shifted to "conflict parties [using] natural resources as one means amongst many others to finance themselves".¹⁴ Illegal mining helped the M23 rebel group rise to power against the local government, leading to perennial tensions in the country. Resource wars in the state "mean that its people are denied the peace, stability and prosperity that would flow from the ethical management of its natural resources. Instead, they are faced with armed struggle, forced labor and high levels of sexual violence"¹⁵ prohibiting much of the DRC's population from living a peaceful life.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² The New York Times (2014): *In Taking Crimea, Putin Gains a Sea of Fuel Reserves*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/18/world/europe/in-taking-crimea-putin-gains-a-sea-of-fuel-reserves.html> (3 January 2021).

¹³ The World from PRX (2014): *ISIS is using water as a weapon in Iraq*. Retrieved from: <https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-07-09/isis-using-water-weapon-iraq> (02 Jan 2021).

¹⁴ DW (2015): Finding long-term solutions for resource conflicts. Retrieved from: <https://www.dw.com/en/finding-long-term-solutions-for-resource-conflicts/a-18539313> (3 January 2021).

¹⁵ ,New internationalist (2013): Natural Resources Used as Weapons. Retrieved from: <https://newint.org/blog/2013/08/15/students-congolese-diaspora-fight-against-conflict-minerals> (3 January 2021).

3.2.1 Establishment of guidelines in the past

According to the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), at least 40 percent of the conflicts of the last 60 years “have been linked to the exploitation of natural resources, whether high-value resources such as timber, diamonds, gold and oil, or scarce resources such as fertile land and water”.¹⁶ Therefore, the United Nations declared on 5 November 2001 that 6 November will be the annual “International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict”.¹⁷

The United Nations Environment Assembly adopted resolution UNEP/EA.2/Res.15 on 27 May 2016, “which recognised the role of healthy ecosystems and sustainably managed resources in reducing the risk of armed conflict, and reaffirmed its strong commitment to the full implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) listed in General Assembly resolution 70/1”.¹⁸

Partnerships and alliances are important in the prevention of exertion of natural resources as well. Therefore, the United Nations has built a partnership with the European Union on “Land, Natural Resources and Conflict Prevention”¹⁹ in 2008. The goal was to “develop and implement a strategic multi-agency project focused on building the capacity of national stakeholders, the UN system and the EU to prevent land and natural resources from contributing to violent conflict”.²⁰ The European Union’s Instrument for Stability finances the project managed by the United Nations Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action which brings together UN agencies and departments “to support countries to improve natural resource management for conflict prevention and peace building”.²¹

¹⁶ The United Nations: *International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict – November 6*. Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/en/observances/environment-in-war-protection-day> (20 December 2020).

¹⁷ United Nations General Assembly (2001): *A/RES/56/4: Observance of the International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict*. Retrieved from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/56/4> (19 December 2020).

¹⁸ The United Nations: *International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict – November 6*. Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/en/observances/environment-in-war-protection-day> (20 December 2020).

¹⁹ The United Nations: *The EU-UN Partnership on Land, Natural Resources and Conflict Prevention*. Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/en/land-natural-resources-conflict/> (19 December 2020).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

3.3 Other Examples of Natural Resources Being Used to Exert Power

3.3.1 The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam is a way of withholding natural resources to control other nations. While it is not directly warfare, it is a means to exert power from one nation over another.

By building the massive dam in Ethiopia, large portions of Nile water are stopped²² before the Blue Nile continues into Sudanese territory. This in turn also affects Egypt's water supply from the Nile.

Water from the Nile is very important to its adjacent countries as they heavily depend on it for agriculture and energy production. In fact, the reason why Ethiopia has built the dam was to use it for electricity as well as storing water reserves for dry periods. The latter is helpful in two ways as the draining of the reservoir during droughts ensures continuous production of energy and irrigation of crops. However, in this scenario only the state of Ethiopia benefits from this. Especially the initial filling of the dam's reservoir means large quantities of Nile water are withheld from those living downstream, leading to loss in crops and electricity. Al-Jazeera predicts that the filling of the reservoir over a span of 21 years would mean a loss of 5% of Egypt's annual water budget and a loss of 3.5% in agricultural area²³. If filled within 7 years this would increase to 22% and 30% loss respectively²⁴.

To conclude, Ethiopia has great power over Sudan and Egypt in the way they fill up the dam's water reservoir and therefore control the amounts of water these nations receive from the Nile.

3.3.2 The Oil-for-Food Programme

The Security Council adopted resolution S/RES/661 in August 1990, which imposed sanctions on Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait²⁵. The sanctions were a near total financial and trade embargo which resulted in massive problems for Iraq. As they were not able to trade with other nations and had to pay large sums of reparations to Kuwait, a humanitarian crisis arose. This is

²² Washington Post (2020): *Africa's largest dam powers dreams of prosperity in Ethiopia — and fears of hunger in Egypt*. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2020/grand-ethiopian-renaissance-dam-egypt-nile/> (19 December 2020).

²³ Al-Jazeera (2020): *Saving the Nile*. Retrieved from: <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2020/saving-the-nile/index.html> (19 December 2020)

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Office of the Iraq Programme (2003): *About the Programme*. Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/Depts/oip/background/index.html> (23 December 2020).

not an example of using natural resources directly as warfare, but rather an example on how the United Nations used them to control the Republic of Iran.

To access the needs arising in the war-torn country of Kuwait and the sanctioned country of Iraq, “the Secretary General dispatched an inter-agency mission” from 10 to 17 March 1991. The Republic of Iraq declined the help of the United Nations to deal with their humanitarian needs, even though they were on the brink of famine and possible epidemics. The government did not accept the help which was offered in resolutions S/RES/706 and S/RES/712 which were adopted in the late summer of 1991²⁶.

As the Republic of Iraq was in dire need for help but refused to take offers, the Security Council adopted resolution S/RES/986²⁷ which established the “oil-for-food” programme in which Iraq could sell their oil “to finance the purchase of humanitarian goods and various mandated United Nations activities concerning Iraq”²⁸.

By limiting their trade possibilities to trade oil for food via the programme, the United Nations was able to regulate the Iraqi trade in some ways to stop the nation from going into another war financed by their oil resources. Limited trade meant limited funds and in turn less funding prohibits the acquisition of weapons.

The programme ended following the Iraq war in 2003.²⁹

3.4 Problems to Answer in a Resolution

Delegates should keep in mind, that natural resources are spread unevenly on earth. Different nations have different reserves of individual goods and are therefore in a good position to trade with other member states. Unfortunately, large portions of said resources are subject to exploitation. Delegates will need to find solutions on how to deal with inner conflicts as well as international conflict about resources.

As population, globalisation and industrialisation keep growing, we become more and more dependent on certain resources and many are on the brink of being depleted. The delegates

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ United Nations Security Council (1995): *S/RES/986: Authorization to permit the import of petroleum and petroleum products originating in Iraq, as a temporary measure to provide for humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people*. Retrieved from: <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/986> (20 December 2020).

²⁸ Office of the Iraq Programme (2003): About the Programme. Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/Depts/oip/background/index.html> (23 December 2020).

²⁹ Ibid.

should investigate fair trade and distribution, helping nations to be present on the world market. They should also look into sanctions and restrictions to be imposed for those who are exploiting the natural resources of others.

3.5 Guiding Questions

Should the United Nations continue to use natural resources as sanctions on member states following conflicts or should they find other ways to deal with the issues?

How should the United Nations deal with state actors exploiting the resources for unauthorized trade?

What can be done to ensure fair distribution of resources, especially as some are almost depleted?

3.6 Recommended Readings

Security Council resolution 986 (1995) for more information on the oil-for-food program:
<http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/986>

As a delegate of a European country you should look into *the EU-UN Partnership on Land, Natural Resources and Conflict Prevention* and your country's stance on it:
<https://www.un.org/en/land-natural-resources-conflict/>

UNEP's and UNDP's Report on "The Role of Natural Resources in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration – Addressing Risks and Seizing Opportunities":
<https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/disasters-conflicts/what-we-do/recovery/environmental-cooperation-peacebuilding>

The "From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment" report from the United Nations Environment Programme:
https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/7867/pcdmb_policy_01.pdf

3. Topic B: De-escalating tensions at the Persian Gulf

4.1 Introduction

The Persian Gulf is a marginal sea of the Indian ocean and located between the Arabian Peninsula and southwestern Iran. At its widest point, it measures 340 km and 55 km from shore to shore in the narrowest point, the strait of Hormuz.³⁰ Eight countries have a shoreline towards the gulf as displayed in Fig.1. The name itself is disputed among the neighboring countries while Arabian countries refer to it as the “Arabian-Gulf” or simply the “Gulf”. The United Nations (UN) have addressed the naming issue several times and reaffirmed the statement of the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names, which endorsed “Persian Gulf” as the official name of the sea.³¹ The on-and offshore reservoirs of crude oil in the area are a major source of wealth for surrounding states, and about 21% of the globally consumed petroleum liquids are transported through the strait of Hormuz.³² With the world economy depending crucially on oil, the region is of enormous economic importance. While political stability is a prerequisite for trade and stable oil supply, the region receives utmost international attention and faced several military escalations such as the Gulf Wars with fierce consequences for the world economy. Furthermore, the humanitarian situation is critical. Long-term conflicts lead to the rise of extremism, ethnic and religious sectarian tensions continue to destabilise the Gulf-states. Recently, escalation has occurred between the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), its ally the United States of America (USA) and Iran. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is deeply concerned on the development and stresses the need for a coherent approach to reestablish peace and security.³³

Starting with the historical and cultural background of the Gulf region, this Background Guide will elaborate on the reasons for the long-lasting tensions and focus on the past and latest escalations among state- and non-state actors. Further, it gives an overview on the reactions of the UN. The final part contains advice for further research and preparation for the conference.

³⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Persian-Gulf>

³¹ https://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Geography/persian.gulf/persian_gulf_name_disputing.htm

³² <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=39932>

³³ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14333.doc.htm>



Figure 1 The neighboring states to the Persian Gulf

4.2 Colonialism and the Modern States of the Middle East

The start of common history of the region which still shapes the modern cultural landscape at the Persian Gulf can be seen in the foundation of Islam in the early 7th century AD in Saudi Arabia by the Prophet Mohammed. Within 15 years, Mohammed's caliphate conquered the entire Arabian Peninsula and the area of the former Persian Empire, which had its main provinces in today's Iran.³⁴ Therefore, the religion of Islam is the basic common ground between all ethnic groups and states in the region. Nevertheless, the frontlines between the neighboring states are still defined by the ethnicity of the state's citizens. For example, Iran considers itself as the ancestor of the Persian Empire, while the states south and west of the Persian Gulf unite behind their Arab heritage. The naming dispute of the shared sea is a prime example for this cultural division. Furthermore, Islam itself has several streams with the Sunni and Shia doctrine having the most followers. As Fig. 2 shows, most Arab states are Sunni-dominated while Iran and southern Iraq are the centers of Shia inhabitants.

³⁴ <https://www.vox.com/a/maps-explain-the-middle-east>

Today’s borders are the result of the rise and fall of the Muslim empires, especially the Ottoman empire, and the mostly British colonialisation of the Middle East. By the outbreak of the First World War, the Persian Gulf was dominated by the Ottoman Empire, British rule and Persia, which was divided up by Russia and Britain in the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907.³⁵ As the collapse of the Ottoman Empire became apparent, Britain and France made a secret contract which historians see as one of the root causes for the long-lasting conflicts within the Middle East. This is known as the Sykes-Picot treaty of 1916. Ignorant of the ethnic groups living in the disputed region and without consultations with the local population³⁶, they divided up the area circumvolving today’s Syria, Israel, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan. The arbitrarily drawn borders of these countries can be traced back to this and several other treaties³⁷. Especially Syria, Iraq and Yemen are highly divided and hotspots of conflict. They have become battlegrounds for proxy wars between regional and international powers, who use the different militant arms of the ethnic groups for their interests without declaring war directly to their foes. A prominent example is the Shia Lebanese Hezbollah militia which is backed by Iran and known for attacks on Israel.

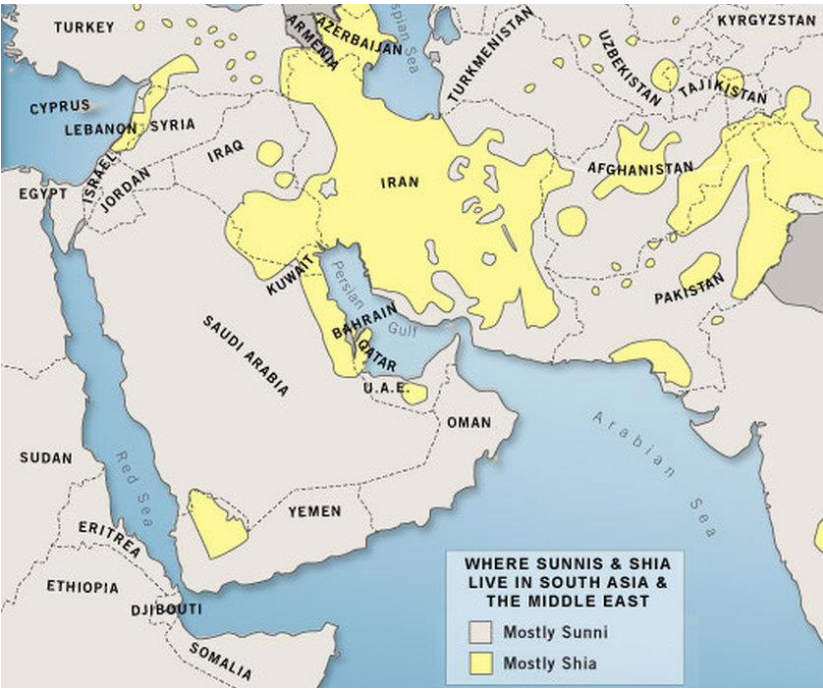


Figure 2 Sunni & Shia regional distribution³⁸

³⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Anglo-Russian-Entente>
³⁶ <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/how-the-curse-of-sykes-picot-still-haunts-the-middle-east>
³⁷ <https://www.vox.com/a/maps-explain-the-middle-east>
³⁸ https://cdn1.vox-cdn.com/assets/4231075/sunni_shia_nasr.jpg

4.3 Armed conflicts at the Persian Gulf

The current situation at the Persian Gulf can be considered as the outcome of the extensive military escalations from 1980-2003, also known as the “Gulf Wars”. The following paragraphs will briefly elaborate on the course of these conflicts and implications for the situation today.

4.3.1 Iran – Iraq War

This conflict lasted from 1980-1988, starting with the invasion of Iraqi troops into Iran, aiming for the permanent control over the border region Khūzestān. The region is oil rich and mostly inhabited by ethnic Arabs.³⁹ Further, the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein was concerned about a Shi`i rebellion incited by the Islamic revolutionist government of Iran. While the offensive failed due to strong Iranian resistance with the regular Iranian army being supported by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, Iraq withdrew all troops by 1982 and sought for a peace agreement with Iran.⁴⁰ However, the Iranian government under Ruhollah Khomeini was not willing to negotiate, resulting in a static war with a fortified front. Both sides faced heavy human casualties and attacks on oil production facilities and tankers in the Persian Gulf led to an economic crisis for both countries. Due to Iranian attacks on tankers from other Arab Gulf-states who financed the Iraqi war efforts, the USA and other western states intervened by stationing warships in the Persian Gulf.

The war ended with a status-quo (no territorial shifts) when the UN mediated a ceasefire (*S/RES/598*).⁴¹ Despite the human losses of at least 1 million, the conflict became infamous for the use of lethal chemical weapons and therefore a direct violation of the Geneva Convention.⁴² The First Gulf War stands symbolic for the main drivers of escalation in the region. First, the gain of economic wealth through occupation of oil-rich territory, and second the conflicts between ethnic groups that goes beyond state borders. A prominent example is here the use of chemical weapons against Iraqi Kurdish civilians by the Iraqi army for suspected collaboration with Iran.⁴³ Those cruelties lead to the deepening of animosity and hostility between the ethnic groups as still present today. Further, the support of the USA for Iraq deepened the anti-American sentiment in Iran.

³⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Iran-Iraq-War>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ <https://peacemaker.un.org/iraqiran-resolution598>

⁴² <https://www.britannica.com/event/Iran-Iraq-War>

⁴³ Ibid.

4.3.2 Persian Gulf War

Also referred to as the “First Gulf War”, it lasted from 1990-1991. It was triggered by the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces who aimed for the annex of Kuwaiti territory meaning access to oil reserves and extending of the Iranian shoreline to the Persian Gulf. Within its consequent *Resolutions S/RES/660-677*, the UNSC called for an immediate withdrawal of Iraqi forces out of Kuwait and released extensive economic sanctions against Iraq. As Saudi Arabia feared to be invaded next, it called for the USA and other NATO allies to send troops to defend the Saudi Arabian border.

When the UNSC released *Resolution S/RES/678*, mandating the use of force against Iran to enforce its retreat from Kuwait, the troops of the anti-Iraq coalition, circumvolving 35 countries, launched invasion of Kuwait on February 24th, 1991. Due to massive air bombardment of Iranian troops and infrastructure, the allied troops took Kuwait City within three days and rushed into Iran, destroying its elite troops⁴⁴. The war ended with a ceasefire on February 28th. The conditions for peace were the destruction of all Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and the acceptance of Kuwait’s sovereignty.⁴⁵

Iraq’s defeat destabilised the country and rebellions of Kurds and Shia people broke out, which were brutally suppressed by Saddam Hussein’s regime. Further, Iran lacked compliance with the UN inspectors surveilling the destruction of illicit weapons⁴⁶. Sanctions continued and the conflict kept on smoldering with hostilities between Iranian and coalition troops.⁴⁷ The alliance between the USA and Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf-states is a remnant of the Persian Gulf war and marked the era of western military presence in the Middle East, predominantly of US troops.

4.3.3 Second Persian Gulf War

In 2002, after the attacks of the terroristic attacks on the USA on 11th September 2001, President George W. Bush accused Iran of supporting al-Qaeda and the possession of weapons of mass destruction. Within UNSC Resolution *S/RES/1441*, the UNSC demanded the admittance of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) inspectors into Iran which could not find evidence for the accusations. In 2003 however, President Bush and the British Prime Minister Tony Blair declared the opposite and posed an ultimatum on March 17th to Saddam Hussein to leave the country within 48 hours. As the Iranian president

⁴⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Persian-Gulf-War>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

refused, a coalition of 22 states lead by the USA launched attack on March 20th without a mandate of the UNSC. While most of the regular Iraqi military did not resist, irregular and paramilitary forces with close ties to the governing party fought against the invading allied troops. By April 9th, the capital of Baghdad was occupied. Major Combat ended on May 1st, 2003 after the seizure of northern Iraq with the support of Kurdish Peshmerga fighters. By December 2003, Saddam Hussein was captured by US forces and executed in 2004 after being sentenced for several war crimes. Under the leadership of the USA, allied troops remained in Iraq until 2011, facing insurgency and attacks on soldiers through bombing and fire attacks from irregular troops.⁴⁸

The invasion of Iraq was, contrary to the Persian Gulf War, not legitimised by a mandate of the UNSC and therefore contrary to international law. This was a direct violation of the authority of the UNSC and damaged its reputation persistently. With the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and the foreign occupation, the Iraq remained without a central political authority and highly divided between its various ethnic groups and the breeding ground for extremism and proxy wars. For example, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), or known in the region as Daesh, held most of its territory in northern Iraq.⁴⁹

4.4 Current Tensions at the Persian Gulf

4.4.1 The Rise of Iran and the GCC Arab Coalition

Currently, there are two coalitions opposing each other in the Persian Gulf region. They can be named by the Pro-Iranian Front composed of Iran and its allied state-and non-state actors and the Anti-Iranian front under the lead of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel.⁵⁰ Fig. 3 gives an overview of this political divide at the Persian Gulf.

⁴⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Iraq-War>

⁴⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Islamic-State-in-Iraq-and-the-Levant>

⁵⁰ https://ecfr.eu/special/battle_lines/

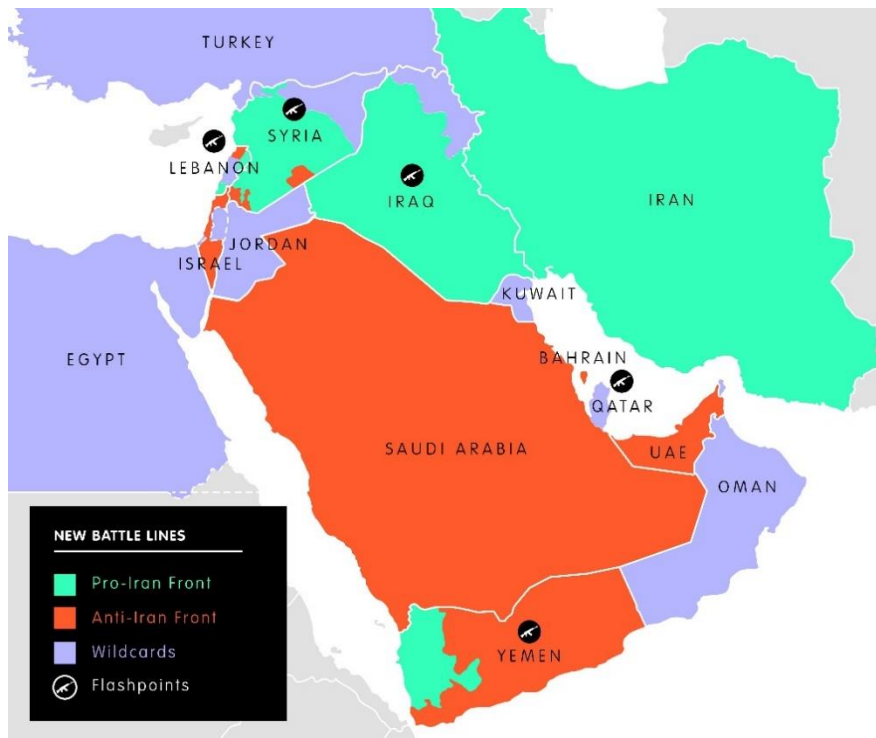


Figure 3 Alliances at the Persian Gulf

The map also shows the regions of military conflict where proxy wars between the alliances take place. These conflicts bear the risk of further escalation that entails the whole region and drawing international actors such as the US or Russia further into the conflict.⁵¹

While Iran is often seen as the aggressor, Iranian leaders view their extension of influence as a strategic mean to prevent military intervention of their military superior enemies, namely the USA, Israel, and the GCC. By building up a network of regional state and non-state actors, Iran tries to firstly bound their enemies' forces in local conflicts, and secondly seek to deter them from attacking Iran directly with the risk of being surrounded by hostile pro-Iranian forces.⁵² This tactic has been successful with the Lebanese Hezbollah militia, which has become the most powerful force in the fragile Lebanese state and is responsible for regular terroristic and missile attacks on Israel.⁵³ Similarly, the support for the Houthi rebels in Yemen has resulted in a long-lasting, devastating conflict between Houthi rebel groups and the Saudi Arabian military.⁵⁴ Another deterrent is the Iranian missile program which, after the withdrawal of the USA from the “Iran nuclear deal”⁵⁵, includes a nuclear threat.

⁵¹ https://ecfr.eu/special/battle_lines/

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ https://ecfr.eu/special/battle_lines/lebanon#menuarea

⁵⁴ https://ecfr.eu/special/battle_lines/yemen#menuarea

⁵⁵ Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JPCOA), UNSC Resolution 2231

4.4.2 Iran Nuclear Program and JPCOA

The Iranian efforts for the use of nuclear technology for civil uses started in the 1950's, receiving technical assistance by the USA in the "Atoms for Peace" programme. With the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, the support ended, resulting in a setback for the country's nuclear ambitions. Since then, Iran has developed uranium enrichment capabilities which could be used for military purposes⁵⁶. In the light of rising tensions in the middle east, several sanctions were imposed on Iran by the UNSC Resolutions *S/RES/1669* in 2006, Resolution *S/RES/1774* in 2007, and Resolution *S/RES/1803* in 2008, aiming to bring the Iranian enrichment programme to a halt. Iran however continued the programme insisting on its right to do so according to international law and adhered to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).⁵⁷ In 2015, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was agreed to between Iran and the permanent members of the UNSC (P5) and Germany, defining rules and quotas for the enrichment of nuclear material and remove sanctions in exchange for compliance with the agreement.⁵⁸

The supervising International Atomic Energy Organization (IAEA) confirmed Iran's compliance with the deal, despite criticism of minor violations of the agreement. As the US government under President Barack Obama ratified and actively pushed the plan, his successor Donald Trump declared on 13th October 2017 to no longer ratify the JCPOA, referring to minor violations of the terms stated in IAEA reports.⁵⁹ While the US Congress did not re-impose sanctions, the deal remained intact. By May 2018, President Trump announced unilateral sanctions by alleging Iran to support terrorism and condemning Iran's ballistic missile program. As a reaction, Iran reduced compliance with JCPOA, exceeding major quotas, however declaring not to pursue the development of a nuclear weapon.⁶⁰

The withdrawal of the USA from JCPOA inflicts a strong setback for international peace and security. The future of the agreement remains unclear and the remaining participating states have expressed their will to continue adherence to it.

4.4.3 Military Escalation between USA and Iran

In the course of 2019 and 2020, several incidents occurred which highly increased tensions at the Persian Gulf, experiencing a peak on January 3rd 2020 with the killing of Quasem Soleimani,

⁵⁶ <https://www.nti.org/learn/countries/iran/nuclear/>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

commander of the Quds Brigade, which is part of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), an Iranian paramilitary force active in several regional conflicts. The following timeline lists incidents displaying the escalation between the USA and Iran

- May 2019, four oil tankers based in Saudi Arabian, VAE and Norway were damaged by explosive devices after passing the Strait of Hormuz for which the USA blamed Iran, however investigations could not identify a perpetrator.⁶¹
- June 13th 2019, two oil tankers based in Japan and Norway were damaged by limpet mines of which one did not explode. However, its origin could not be determined. As with the attacks in June, the USA blamed Iran which denied any involvement.⁶²
- September 15th 2019, drone attacks on two oil processing facilities of the Saudi Arabian company Aramco severely reduced Saudi Arabia's oil output, leading to an increase in world oil prices. Houthi rebels claimed responsibility for the attack leading to the USA to accuse Iran to be the string puller since it supplies the Yemeni rebels with weapons and financially.⁶³
- December 27th 2019, a rocket attack on an Iraqi military base in Kirkuk kills an American contractor.⁶⁴ Within a tweet on the 30th December, US President Trump accused Iran directly for being responsible and state officials later claimed that the Iranian backed Kata'ib Hezbollah was responsible for the attack.⁶⁵
- January 1st 2020, in response to US drone strike on a weapons depot of Kata'ib Hezbollah killing 25 fighters, over thousand protesters storm the US embassy in Iraq, leading to a deployment of additional 750 American troops in the Middle East.⁶⁶

⁶¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/13/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-oil-tanker-sabotage.html>

⁶² <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/13/world/middleeast/oil-tanker-attack-gulf-oman.html>

⁶³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/14/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-refineries-drone-attack.html>

⁶⁴ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/u-s-contractor-killed-service-members-wounded-rocket-attack-iraq-n1108096>

⁶⁵ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/u-s-contractor-whose-killing-iraq-was-cited-trump-was-n1112266>

⁶⁶ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/tear-gas-fired-iraqi-protesters-gather-outside-u-s-embassy-n1109216>

- January 3rd 2020, an air strike at the Baghdad airport by US forces killed the popular Iranian general Qassem Soleimani, commander of the Quds brigade. Within a statement, Iran's supreme leader immediately called for "severe revenge".⁶⁷
- January 5th 2020, Iran ends its commitment to JPCOA as a direct reaction to the killing of Quasem Soleimani.
- January 8th 2020, as a retaliation for the killing of Quasem Soleimani, Iranian forces carried out missile attacks on Iraqi military bases hosting US troops. The attacks resulted in no casualties, however over 100 US military personnel suffered brain injuries.⁶⁸ In response, the USA tightened sanctions on Iran.
- March 12th 2020, two US and one British soldier were killed and further coalition personnel wounded by missile attacks on camp Taji in Iraq, which were allegedly conducted by the Kata'ib Hezbollah.⁶⁹
- April 2020, on several incidents, small vessels of the IRGC approached US navy ships in the Persian Gulf and surrounded them without reacting to warning signals of the US warships.

4.5 Reactions of the United Nations

The UN has played a key role in mediating in the conflict at the Persian Gulf. Since the conflict results in an imminent threat to peace and security, the UNSC is the key body in which the matter is discussed. Besides, the Human Rights Council (HRC) has condemned the killing of Quasem Soleimani as a violation of international law, calling it an extrajudicial and arbitrary execution.⁷⁰ Within a meeting of the UNSC on 20 October 2020, UN Secretary General António Guterres has expressed deep concern over the situation at the Persian Gulf, especially on the

⁶⁷ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/who-was-qassim-suleimani-why-does-his-death-matter-n1109846>

⁶⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-security-usa-casualties-idUSKBN1ZG0AX>

⁶⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51842744>

⁷⁰ <https://www.businessinsider.com/un-says-us-soleimani-assassination-unlawful-no-evidence-iran-terror-2020-7?r=DE&IR=T>

situation in Yemen. He encouraged the international community, particularly the UNSC, to find common solution for this vital part of the world.⁷¹ Guterres also sees the JCPOA as a critical mean to address nuclear non-proliferation and relief tensions deeming from the Iranian nuclear programme. The meeting was presided by the foreign minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov and followed a concept note including key questions approaching the conflict on international level.⁷² Russia envisions the creation of a new security system in the region under a newly created “Organization for Security and Cooperation in the Persian Gulf” including all regional countries, Russia, China, USA, the EU, India and other interested parties or organisations.⁷³

4.6 Recommendations for Further Research

As the situation at the Persian Gulf remains critical, recent developments might be of interest for the individual preparation of the conference. We therefore recommend checking any news concerning the Persian Gulfregion. Due to the election of Joe Biden as president of the USA, a new foreign policy might trigger a new dynamic in diplomatic relations. The “Questions for discussion” listed in the Russian concept note to the UN Secretary-General can serve as an orientation for research and solution proposals. Inthe following section, you will find recommended readings to further deepen your understanding of the topic.

4.6.1 Recommended Readings

- UNSC Press release after “Comprehensive review of the situation in the Persian Gulf region”
<https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14333.doc.htm>

- Concept Note by the Russian Federation for UNSC meeting
<https://undocs.org/S/2020/1013>

- Interactive Maps and Essays on Flashpoints and positions of states at the Persian Gulf
https://ecfr.eu/special/battle_lines/

⁷¹ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14333.doc.htm>

⁷² <https://undocs.org/S/2020/1013>

⁷³ Ibid.

- Summary on the Iranian Nuclear Program and JCPOA
<https://www.nti.org/learn/countries/iran/nuclear/>
- Collection of Maps explaining key issues in the Middle East
<https://www.vox.com/a/maps-explain-the-middle-east>