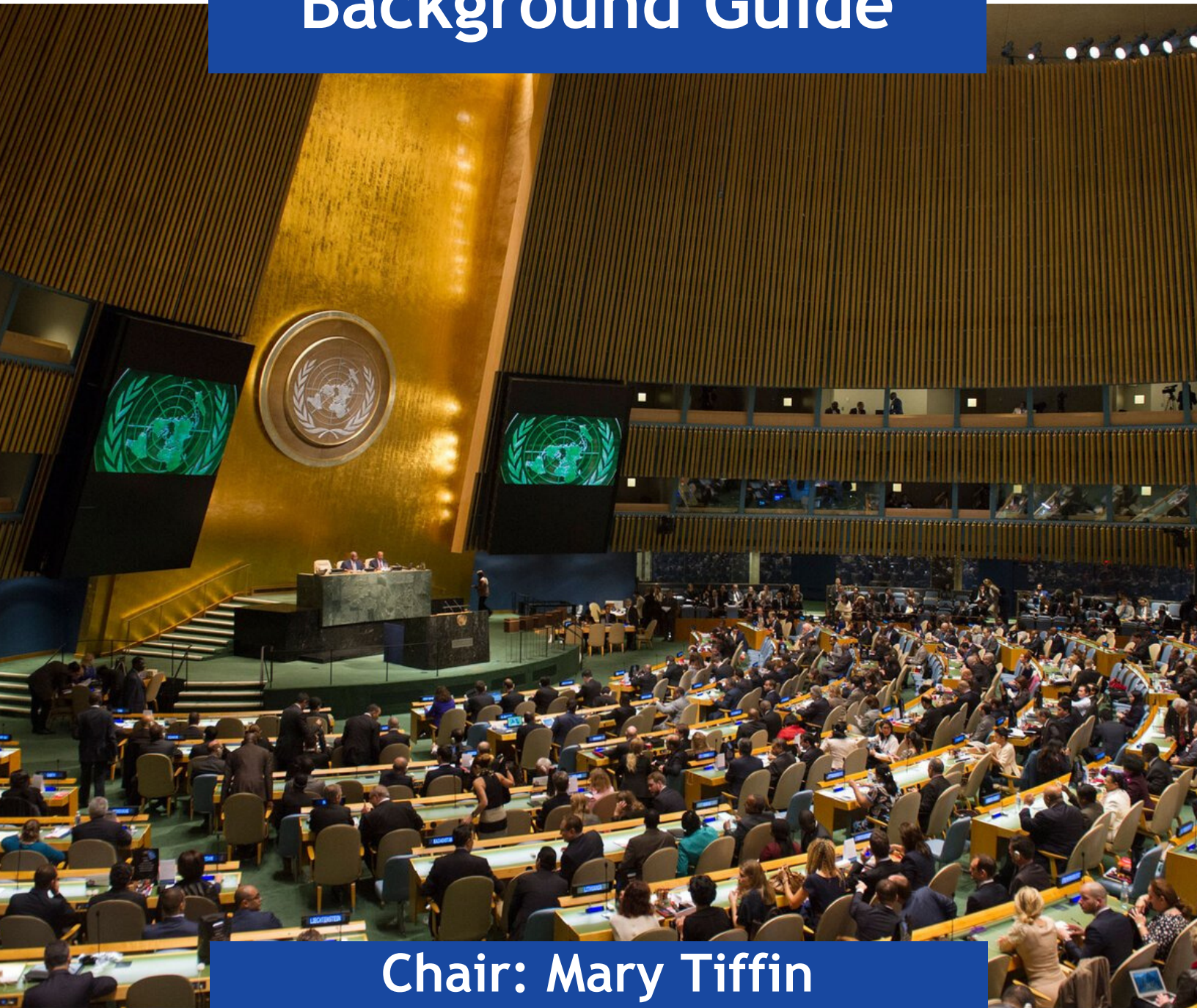




SHUMUN XXV // February 24-25

DISEC

Background Guide



Chair: Mary Tiffin
Vice Chair: Neve Walker

Welcome to the 25th iteration of SHUMUN, Seton Hall University's flagship Model UN Conference for high schoolers! This will be an innovative two-day simulation of the United Nations for high school students hosted by Seton Hall University on February 24th and 25th. It will push them through substantive debate and academic rigor and challenge them to the depths of their creativity.

SHUMUN's Mission

SHUMUN XXV is a model United Nations conference for high school students with a long history of engaging simulations and enrichment of the delegates in attendance. Our conference offers both General Assembly and Crisis-style simulations. SHUMUN aims to promote public speaking and collaboration skills among high school students while fostering an engaging environment to expand students' interests in international affairs. We seek to provide delegates with an educational and entertaining weekend acting as member-states in United Nations bodies, other multinational bodies, or as individuals in creative problem-solving crisis simulations.

Seton Hall University is a large proponent of their student body's interest in Model United Nations and also has a competitive collegiate team, SHUNA, in addition to SHUMUN. Many Senior Secretariat and Dais members also compete with our nationally ranked team, SHUNA, and we pride ourselves on our large amounts of Model UN experience. However, we also pride ourselves on our diversity of conference staff and the ability of individuals of all interests and experience levels to join and participate in running our conference.

Hosted on Seton Hall University's campus in South Orange, New Jersey, SHUMUN is a constantly evolving conference looking to provide the best experience to delegates year after year. Since 1999, SHUMUN has been a staple of Seton Hall's Model UN scene which also includes a competitive collegiate team, SHUNA.

Our entire staff is more than excited to see delegates respond to crisis updates and navigate their curiosities for international affairs!

— SHUMUN —

Table of Contents

1. Letter from the Chair.....	3
2. Notes on Procedure.....	5
3. Tips for GA Committees.....	6
4. Committee Introduction.....	8
5. Content Expectations.....	12
6. Topic A.....	13
7. Topic A Questions to Consider.....	18
8. Topic B.....	19
9. Topic B Questions to Consider.....	25
10. Positions.....	26
11. Bibliography and Works Cited.....	27



SHUMUN

Letter From the Chair

Dear Delegates,

Hello and welcome to SHUMUN XXV at Seton Hall University! My name is Mary Tiffin, and I am thrilled to serve as your chair for the Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC 2015). I am a senior double majoring in Economics and International Relations with a minor in French. I am originally from Saint Louis, Missouri, and I have been involved in the debate world since high school. I am the current President of Seton Hall's collegiate Model UN team (SHUNA) in addition to serving two previous terms on Eboard, crisis staffing our virtual collegiate conference HallMUN, and staffing every SHUMUN since my freshman year, most recently serving as the chair for last year's Vienna Convention Committee at SHUMUN XXIV.

I'm so honored to be working with this amazing team for our 25th year as a high school Model UN Conference here on our South Orange Campus. The Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) deals with disarmament and global threats to peace that affect the international community intending to create solutions to protect communities and promote peace. As the first committee of the United Nations General Assembly, DISEC has produced landmark resolutions over the years, in addition to the first UN General Assembly resolution in history.

The mid-2010s were critical in shaping the current geopolitical landscape we are in today. The sudden Russian Annexation of Crimea was Russia's first step in asserting its military presence over its bordering regions, which laid the foundations for its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This event exposed cracks within the effectiveness of the UN Security Council as Russia is one of the permanent members that holds veto power, in addition to posing discussions surrounding state sovereignty and war crimes. Similarly, the Syrian Civil War was a

SHUMUN XXV
DISEC

complex geopolitical landscape of not only various parties within the Middle East but also outside actors such as Russia and the United States intervening on behalf of certain players. This poses discussions regarding civil wars, ethnopolitical landscapes, arms deals, and Great Power influence in regional conflicts.

The overarching themes between these two topics are international peace and security, Great Power intervention in regional conflicts, proxy wars, ethnopolitical landscapes, cultural sovereignty/protections, and the overall effectiveness of the UN Security Council. By having this assembly take place in 2015, this committee has the opportunity to change the actions of the past to better inform global security practices and promote peace in the 2020s and beyond.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the committee or its topics, do not hesitate to reach out. I will also be joined by my wonderful vice-chair Neve Walker throughout this conference. I look forward to welcoming you all to SHUMUN 25, the best iteration of the conference yet!

Sincerely,
Mary Tiffin (she/her)
mary.tiffin@student.shu.edu

— SHUMUN —

Notes on Procedure

1. SHUMUN will be utilizing Google Docs and Gmail for the conference. For any questions contact our email: shumun.se@gmail.com. Delegates will communicate in-room with paper notes.
2. SHUMUN uses Parliamentary Procedure (often abbreviated as Parli Pro) to run committees. A Google search will give you more than enough information on how this is used in Model UN, and any other questions can easily be addressed in committee.
3. SHUMUN has a **zero-tolerance policy regarding bullying, offensive remarks, harassment, discrimination, or anything of the sort**. Model UN should be a fun activity for delegates to participate in and no one should feel excluded at any point during the weekend. If at any point the Senior Secretariat is notified of any violation of this policy, the delegate and advisor will be contacted and the issue will be discussed, potentially resulting in expulsion from the conference or disqualification from awards. In general, if you think even for a second that something would offend someone, do not do, or say that thing.
4. **Position papers are required for General Assembly Committees**. You can find your chair's email on the website and in the background guides of each committee. Position Papers will be accepted until the beginning of Committee Session 1 on February 24th. Failure to turn in position papers will hurt awarding prospects. **For DISEC, please email position papers to the chair Mary.tiffin@student.shu.edu.**
5. Profanity is prohibited.
6. Pre-writing is defined as any notes or directives written outside of committee time and is strictly prohibited. Delegates are allowed to bring research into the committee, but not pre-written notes or papers. Engaging in pre-writing will result in immediate disqualification from award consideration.
7. **Technology is only permitted during unmoderated caucuses or at the discretion of the chair**. Research must be done prior to the beginning of committee sessions. Any usage of cell phones or laptops in the committee is grounds for disqualification.
8. If you need to use the restroom during committee, you do not need to raise your hand or ask permission.
9. The session will begin with a roll call followed by a primary speakers list to debate which topic will be discussed. Delegates will then vote on the motion to set the agenda after the chair decides enough debate has been conducted. After the agenda is set, a secondary speakers list will be created and delegates will have the opportunity to present motions at the chair's discretion.

Tips for General Assemblies

Bloc building and the politics behind it:

1. Your bloc in General Assembly Committees is influential and will be an important factor in determining if your papers will pass and how you will get additional opportunities to speak
2. Begin building connections as soon as the debate is opened to get your name out there and start building your presence in the room. Do this by sending notes and networking before the session begins.
3. Once you have your bloc, **DO. NOT. BURN. BRIDGES.** with the other people in your committee because you may need their support later on with merges and you want to maintain the image of someone everyone wants to work with
4. **REMAIN AWARE** of which school each delegate comes from because even if the delegates aren't going to openly sit next to each other or are working on the same drafts, they will still maintain that connection and will definitely talk about their blocs and ideas outside of the committee
 - a. Especially in committees where you are the only person from your high school, you may not have that same advantage but you can be aware of it and try to limit the other people's power with your knowledge

Draft working paper mergers and author's panel deliberation:

1. When finishing draft papers, the topic of presentations or Q&A speeches may come into play, and this will also almost certainly happen during merges as you start to work on draft resolutions
2. In regard to speaker deliberation, it gets awkward and unformattable really quickly, and for those of us who are nonconfrontational, this is definitely one of if not the hardest parts of general assembly committees
 - a. Based on your skills and contributions to the paper, decide for yourself first what your first priority is:
 - i. It truly varies by bloc and committee whether presenting the paper or responding to Q&A will be better for you
 - b. Don't be afraid to be sneaky and be self-aware of the stances and images of the people in your bloc

- i. The page limits, the number of people who get to speak, the number of people who get to stay sponsors, and those that move to sigs, be aware of all of this so that you can first decide for yourself on what is best for your and second decide what is best for your blocs' positions
- ii. You need backing when nominating yourself which is where your substance contributions to the paper come into play in addition to speaking skills, being able to *eloquently explain* your work and what you want to say, and have the support of others
- iii. This is also where being a positive and *respectful* member of your bloc comes into play as oftentimes when speaker deliberation goes to a vote, people won't vote for the delegates who have been annoying or rude

Mergers and Unmods

5. Be aware of the **conflicts of interest** between *content* and *competitors*
 - a. Content: for the sake of cooperation, you want to merge with papers that either have similar ideas to yours OR touch on other sectors that are different than yours so that they can naturally flow together
 - b. Competitors: if someone in your bloc comes from **the same school** as another bloc you are trying to merge with, be aware that those people's loyalties are now can be split between their school and your bloc
6. **THESE ARE THE UNMODS** that count, this is where to speak up and show your diplomacy skills because the chair and committee staffers will notice
 - a. Even just for the sake of an argument and presenting a new perspective, share what's on your mind so that the merger can get attached to you
7. Always be on the move, do not stay settled within your bloc once you get there, when working on draft working papers you should already be starting to think about mergers etc. etc.
8. This stuff takes time to learn and feel good about so **RELAX. Actually, have FUN!!** That's what matters at the end of the day so if you aren't enjoying it and feel like you aren't getting anything out of it, **prioritize fun and yourself over everything else.**

Committee Introduction

The Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC), was established under the UN Charter to uphold “general principles of cooperation in the maintenance of international peace and security, including the principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments and also to give recommendations with regard to such principles to the Members or to the Security Council.”¹ Having been established as the First Committee of the United Nations, the history of DISEC is deeply intertwined with the history of the UN itself. In the wake of the global distribution and disarray that resulted from World War II, world leaders worked together to establish a general body and charter to create a new international organization, the United Nations, to firstly prevent another full-scale global conflict but also to maintain international peace more generally, give humanitarian aid to those peoples and communities in need, protect human rights, and uphold international law.² With this mission in mind, landmark documents led to the establishment of DISEC in 1945.

On January 24, 1946, in London, England, the very first UN General Assembly resolution was adopted from DISEC. The document was titled “Establishment of a Commission to Deal with the Problems Raised by the Discovery of Atomic Energy”, and it was signed by all member states at the time. Additionally, DISEC “works in close cooperation with the United Nations Disarmament Commission and the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament, and it is the only Main Committee of the General Assembly entitled to verbatim records coverage”³.

Thus, not only is DISEC groundbreaking in its nature as the first committee, but it also holds

¹ “DISEC: Disarmament & International Security Committee.” *National High School Model UN Conference*, 2020.

² “History of the United Nations.” *The United Nations*, 2023.

³ “Disarmament and International Security (First Committee).” *UN General Assembly*, 2023.

unique specifications within its working methods that have continued to evolve over time as the global world order has become more diverse and complex.

The First Committee has changed and edited its methods over the years to streamline its agenda and improve its organizational capacities within the context of the growing General Assembly as a whole. For example, during the 59th session, “in response to a request of the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States on improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee, a report compiling those views was submitted by the Secretariat”³. Though the question of effectiveness was raised by the Secretary-General at the time, most member states agreed in their statements that there were issues regarding the committee’s impact, especially in regards to its connections with the Security Council.

Similar to DISEC, the Security Council acts as one of the main operating powers under the UN Charter, and it is made up of fifteen total members. The United States, China, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom are the five permanent members that hold veto power for resolutions. Over the years, Russia has been the largest veto user out of the five permanent members, blocking one hundred and fifty-two total resolutions since the Council’s founding as of February 2023.⁴ Apart from the permanent members, there are ten elected members who serve two-year terms that cannot be served consecutively. These ten elected members do not hold veto power, but they are included in the Security Council’s presidency which rotates on a monthly basis. The main goals and responsibilities of the Security Council are to take “the lead in determining the existence of a threat to the peace or act of aggression. It calls upon the parties to dispute to settle it by peaceful means and recommends methods of adjustment or terms of settlement. In some cases, the Security Council can resort to imposing sanctions or even

⁴ “Backgrounder: the UN Security Council.” *The Council on Foreign Relations*, February 28, 2023.

authorize the use of force to maintain or restore international peace and security”⁵. This purpose is essential to the effective operating power of the UN, but when it comes to matters involving the members of the Security Council themselves, more importantly, the permanent members, there are often complications that go against the goals of the Council itself.

This speaks to an earlier point regarding calls for reform and criticism to improve the effectiveness of the Security Council and the UN altogether. The largest source of concern is rooted in the lack of change in structure since the formation of the UN as the world order in which the United Nations was enacted is very different from the contemporary socio-political landscape that we are living in today. For example, “even as the UN’s overall membership has nearly quadrupled (from fifty-one to 193 member states) thanks to decolonization and the dissolution of multiethnic states, the council’s composition has expanded only once, in 1965, when the addition of four elected seats grew the council from eleven to fifteen members”⁶. Furthermore, the unchanging veto power for permanent members like Russia has caused “frequent council paralysis, exacerbated by deepening geopolitical rivalry between Western democracies and authoritarian China and Russia”⁶. Thus, the initial purpose of the Security Council to be the leading force in combating breaches to international security has been corrupted, and the need for reform is more necessary now than ever before with the emergence of new weapons technologies, the increase in geopolitical tension between nations, and complex ethnopolitical landscapes within regional conflicts.

At the time of this DISEC assembly meeting, the ten elected members of the Security Council were **Rwanda, South Korea, Argentina, Australia, Luxembourg, Angola, Malaysia, Venezuela, New Zealand, and Spain**. Not only are the members of the Security Council pivotal

⁵ “United Nations Security Council.” *The United Nations*, 2023.

⁶ Patrick, Stewart, Sithembile Mbete, Matias Spektor, et. all. “UN Security Council Reform: What the World Thinks.” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, June 28, 2023.

SHUMUN XXV
DISEC

during this time period of unrest and political instability, but every member state of this committee has its own unique experience and perspective on UN Security Council reform, ethnopolitical landscapes, war crimes, and the growing influence powerful nations like Russia have on regional conflicts. These major themes overlap between the two distinct topics up for debate during this DISEC assembly: The Russian Annexation of Crimea and the Syrian Civil War.



Context Expectations

The two topics of this committee will touch upon serious issues such as human rights, war crimes, terrorism, and violence. **Delegates must maintain the utmost respect and sensitivity when discussing such complex issues that have real-world implications for communities and individuals.** Additionally, the topics at hand within international conflicts discussed in the Disarmament and International Security Committee also have direct implications for groups and regimes that may promote xenophobia, antisemitism, islamophobia, homophobia, racial inequality, and ethnic cleansing, among other forms of discrimination and hate. Any behavior, actions, or words that remotely promote any of these ideologies will not be accepted within this committee. Delegates are expected to engage in all topics with respect and consideration towards not only the other members of our committee but to those affected by these issues within the real world.

Racism, discrimination, or rudeness in the committee of any sort will not be tolerated. All delegates should engage in debate with sensitivity. All delegates are expected to be aware of the types of solutions and implementation techniques they are proposing such that all written content is also mindful. Should these content expectations be violated, please do not hesitate to contact the Under-Secretary-General or one of the chairs of this committee.

In addition, the countries of this committee have their own unique political, cultural, and security landscapes that have changed in the time since 2015. **While delegates can keep in mind the modern-day socio-political landscape as it may impact their country and the topics chosen for debate, the purpose of setting this committee in the year 2015 is to analyze the impact of the conflicts discussed in the background guide to better inform international security policies and peace initiatives** to better prevent the large scale conflicts that are happening in the world today.

An example of this is Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Topic A (Russia's Annexation of Crimea) is a direct contributor to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine that occurred in February 2022, and the war is still ongoing at the time this background guide is being written (December 2023). However, Ukraine should not engage in debate, written or orally, acting in a manner as if it is currently being occupied by Russian troops. Ukraine can use the knowledge of the future, knowing that Russia will invade and that they will be fighting a war in a matter of years, to inform their policy stances and program initiatives, but in the actual debate and conference setting itself, current events should not be discussed.

Again, to be very clear, **you can use the knowledge of current events to inform your ideas and policy solutions, but when debating and writing your resolutions, please undergo this simulation as if we are actually in 2015.**

Please reach out to your chair, Mary Tiffin, or a member of the Secretariat should you have any questions!

Topic A - The Russian Annexation of Crimea

Historically, the region of Crimea has been moved around by different rulers. From 1783 to 1954, Crimea was part of Russia when the Tsarist Empire annexed it a decade after defeating Ottoman forces in the Battle of Kozludzha. In 1954, however, the area turned Soviet when the Soviet government transferred Crimea from the Russian Soviet Federation of Socialist Republics (RSFSR) to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.⁷ The period between 1783 and 1954 was not necessarily peaceful though. The Crimean War of 1853-56 consisted of Russia fighting against an alliance of Great Britain, France, Sardinia, and Turkey.⁸ This war was fought mainly on the Crimea peninsula. The Allied forces took the city of Sevastopol, the home of the Tsar's Black Sea Fleet, after a long siege.⁹ By the end of the war in 1856, Crimea lay in ruins.

A civil war also broke out in the wake of the Russian Revolution in 1917. During this war, Crimea was the place for brutal fighting between Tsarist, Bolshevik, and anarchist forces. Following the Bolshevik victory, Crimea became part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.¹⁰ In 1944, the dictator Josef Stalin deported the entire Crimean Tatar population to Central Asia and other parts of the Soviet Union based on alleged collaborations with the Nazis.¹¹ The transfer of Crimea from Russia to Ukraine was announced in late February 1954 in the Soviet Press. This was eight days after the President of the USSR Supreme Soviet adopted a resolution authorizing the move. The Soviet Union during this time was under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev and transferred Crimea from RSFSR to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.⁷

⁷Kramer, Mark. "Why Did Russia Give Up Crimea 60 Years Ago?" *Wilson Center*.

⁸ Ray, Michael. "History of Crimea" *Britannica*.

⁹ "The Siege of Sevastopol October 1854-September 1855" *Royal Museums Greenwich*. 28 July 2010.

¹⁰ "A Brief History of Crimea" *VOA News*. 27 February 2014.

¹¹ "Ukraine Profile: A Timeline" *BBC*. 5 March 2020.

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Crimea became part of the newly independent Ukraine. Moscow and Kyiv agreed to divide up the former Soviet Black Sea Fleet. In 2014, ethnic Russians accounted for 58 percent of Crimea's population, while Ukrainians make up 24 percent, Crimean Tatars, since returning to the peninsula after the fall of the Soviet Union, comprise 12 percent of the Crimean population ¹⁰.

Today, the conflict has intensified. In February and March 2014, Russian forces invaded the Crimean Peninsula and annexed it. This act took place immediately following the Revolution of Dignity (the Ukrainian Revolution that took place in February 2014 and the end of the Euromaidan protests and deadly clashes in Kyiv, which resulted in the ousting of the pro-Russia President Viktor Yanukovich and a return of the 2004 constitution) ¹¹ and was the first act of the wider Russo-Ukrainian War.

Events rapidly unfolded after the ousting of Yanukovich, as Russia executed an operation using both its naval infantry forces that were already in place and special forces that were lifted to Crimea. ¹² Russia hid troop movements with a snap exercise, also deploying a distraction force near Ukrainian borders. With this use of leveraging mobility, speed of action, and the capability to command forces securely at the small-unit level, the Russian troops were able to quickly seize control of the peninsula. Russia had 12,000 military personnel in the Black Sea Fleet at the time, the only infantry unit was the 810th Independent Naval Infantry Brigade. ¹³ On February 24, the city council of Sevastopol enacted a Russian citizen as the mayor, and several units of the 810th Naval Infantry arrived in armored personnel carriers (in violation of the rules governing basing arrangements in Crimea). This was the first sign that Russia had decided to intervene militarily to change the political order in Crimea ¹².

¹² Kofman, Michael. "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine" *Rand Corporation*.

¹³ Encyclopedia Britannica. "Ukraine: The Crisis in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine." Britannica.

During this time came the persecution of the Crimean Tatars, an ethnic Muslim minority indigenous to the Crimean Peninsula. The apparent goal of this persecution was to silence dissent on the peninsula, according to Human Rights Watch.¹⁴ Many Crimean Tatars openly opposed Russian occupation. “Russian authorities in Crimea have relentlessly persecuted Crimean Tatars for their vocal opposition to Russia’s occupation since it began in 2014,” said Hugh Williamson, Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “They have portrayed politically active Crimean Tatars as extremists and terrorists, forced many into exile, and ensured that those who choose to stay never feel safe to speak their mind.”¹⁴

Reactions to this invasion varied by region. The United States and European Union responded by enacting sanctions against Russia for its role in the annexation and urged Russia to withdraw. That being said, former Soviet states like Belarus believe that Crimea is part of Russia.¹⁵ Russia, in reaction to the sanctions, accused the United States and the EU of funding and directing the revolution and retaliated to the sanctions by imposing their own. On March 6th, the Crimean parliament voted to secede from Ukraine and join the Russian Federation. This was decided with a public referendum, a move that was hailed by Russia but condemned in the West. Former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yatsenyuk affirms that Kyiv’s position is that Crimea is an integral part of Ukraine. On the day of the referendum, observers noted numerous irregularities in the voting process, including the presence of armed men at polling stations. The result of the vote was overwhelmingly 97 percent in favor of joining Russia. The interim government in Kyiv rejected the result¹³.

On March 27, 2014, the United Nations General Assembly approved a resolution declaring the invalidity of the March 16 Crimean referendum to secede from Ukraine. This

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch. "Persecution of Crimean Tatars Intensifies." HRW, 14 Nov. 2017.

¹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. "Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belerus" Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus.

resolution was adopted by a vote of 100 Member States in favor, and 11 against, with 58 countries abstaining.¹⁶ The Security Council was not as successful as the General Assembly though as the draft resolution that was written regarding the annexation was vetoed by Russia. Thirteen countries voted in favor of the draft text whereas Russia voted against it and China abstained. If passed, the resolution would have reaffirmed Ukraine's "sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity" and declared that the referendum which could lead to Crimea's break with Ukraine and union with Russia, "can have no validity."¹⁷

Thus, the events surrounding the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 reflect a complex historical background marked by shifting geopolitical dynamics and a disregard for the sovereignty of neighboring countries. The region's history, from the Crimean War to the post-Soviet era, has seen frequent changes in control and significant conflicts, contributing to the fragile nature of the situation. Russia's actions in Crimea highlighted a pattern of dominance and a lack of consideration for the principles of international law, particularly in terms of respecting the sovereignty of Ukraine.

The international community responded with varying degrees of effectiveness. While the General Assembly declared the March 16 Crimean referendum invalid, reaffirming Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the Security Council faced obstacles. The resolution drafted by the Security Council to denounce the annexation was vetoed by Russia, revealing the limitations of the UN in addressing such crises effectively. Looking back, the case of Crimea underscores the need for international institutions to address geopolitical challenges more robustly. The UN and the Security Council, in particular, could have played a more decisive role in preventing the violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and condemning the annexation. The events

¹⁶ Library of Congress. "United Nations Resolution Declares Crimea Referendum Invalid." *Global Legal Monitor*, 2 Apr. 2014.

¹⁷ United Nations News. "UN Security Council Action on Crimea Referendum Blocked." *UN News*, 15 Mar. 2014.

SHUMUN XXV
DISEC

in Crimea serve as a reminder of the ongoing complexities in balancing the interests of the powerful nations and the principles of international law, as well as the importance of global cooperation in maintaining peace and stability by combatting war crimes. This assembly of DISEC must reflect on the challenges facing the Security Council in order to better charge and challenge nations like Russia that disregard the sovereignty of states in order to prevent further escalation of conflict that may turn regional disputes into full-scale wars.



Questions to Consider for Topic A

1. How does the annexation of Crimea challenge the concept of national sovereignty, particularly at the United Nations?
2. What role did the Soviet Union's past history in the Crimean region play in Russia's motivation to annex it? What precedent does this set in regard to large nations and strong military powers threatening the sovereignty of other smaller nations?
3. How did Russia's allies, both in the Baltics and around the world, help support this aggression and impact the lack of action taken by the Security Council and the United Nations?
4. What is the Ukrainian perspective on this issue? How has it changed Ukraine's policies towards both Crimea and Russia?
5. What was the overall global reaction in terms of media outlets and social justice? What impact did the global reaction, or lack thereof, have in holding Russia accountable?
6. What, if any, charges were brought against Russia and its military allies in reaction to any destruction or war crimes that resulted from this conflict?
7. What can the Security Council do in its current state to hold Russia accountable and charge them for their breaches of international law?
8. What reforms to the UN Charter can be made to increase the effectiveness of the Security Council, specifically in terms of limiting the veto power of the five permanent members?

Topic B - The Syrian Civil War and Russian/Western Intervention

The Syrian Civil War, similar to many conflicts within the Middle East, is rooted in the colonial history of the region that has contributed to ethnic tensions between various groups. Syria, specifically, was occupied and ruled under French imperialism following the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I. The French colonialists established the borders of what is now known as Syria and Lebanon. These borders forced many disparate groups together and established diversity of religion and ethnicity in the area. This is important as “there are lots of countries whose borders were imposed by European imperialists that manage to do fine, but the point is that French colonialism set up modern-day Syria in a way that contributed to tension between ethnic and religious groups, which eventually became important for today’s wars”¹⁸. When French colonial rule ended in the 1960s, the Syrian military rose to power with a government controlled by Alawite Shia Muslims. During this period, the political situation in Syria was very intense as “the Alawites saw maintaining a sectarian government as their best hope for securing themselves from persecution and even massacre, but the Sunni majority was blocked from meaningful political power and angry about it”¹⁵. Thus, various smaller civil wars or conflicts between groups took place throughout the rest of the 20th century, and in 2011, uprisings and protests in Syria occurred after the broader series of events that are altogether known as the Arab Spring.

The Arab Spring was a series of pro-democracy uprisings throughout the Middle East and North Africa in 2011. What is considered the official “spark” of the conflict occurred on December 17, 2010, when a man in Tunisia named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself fully on fire

¹⁸ Beauchamp, Zack. “The Syria war: a history.” *Vox*, September 21, 2015.

to protest against police harassment. He later died from his injuries on January 4, 2011, but this demonstration sparked protests about the cost of living and the authoritarian government, more specifically Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. This started a domino effect throughout the rest of the region leading to rising protests against “authoritarianism, corruption, and poverty”¹⁹ in various countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya.

While it began with acts of protest, the uprisings eventually became violent which caused events such as the Libyan War which involved Western powers such as France, England, and the United States using their air forces against the country’s leader Muammar Gaddafi. In response to these efforts, teenagers back in Syria used graffiti to express their political beliefs, and “the torture of the youths sparked mainly peaceful protests at first and calls for democratic reform, but with violent repression by the government, the revolt turned into civil war”¹⁵. Bashar al-Assad, Syria’s president since 2000, oversaw government massacres in response to previous experiences with uprisings and thus was the main party that turned what was a nonviolent conflict into a civil war.

Furthermore, in 2011, the Sunni extremist group al-Qaeda in Iraq regained prominence after being defeated in the late 2000s, and top leadership from the organization went to Syria as an opportunity to establish extremist roots within communities and governments¹⁵. By March 2012, the death toll from the Syrian conflict was in the thousands, and by January 2013, it was tens of thousands, and “much of that can be blamed on the Assad regime’s vicious assaults on civilian-populated areas”¹⁵ through means such as the barrel bomb. However, it was at this point in the conflict that outside actors such as Iran entered the fold within Syria as the two countries have been allies since 1980, and Iran “uses Syria to convey weapons and other goods to its proxies and allies, most notably Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza”¹⁵. Thus, Iran sent

¹⁹ “What is the Arab Spring, and how did it start?” *Aljazeera*, December 17, 2020.

forces to support the Assad regime, and this was brought to the attention of Israeli and U.S. officials as well. Furthermore, the Arab States along the Persian Gulf that had pre-existing tensions with Iran observed the situation as a threat to their own security, so “when Assad began to teeter, the Gulf states saw an opportunity to unseat one of Iran’s principal allies, and started sending arms to the Syrian rebels”¹⁵. This trend of countries and actors outside of the civil war, notably the US, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, sending arms and support to both sides in Syria only grew as the years went on, which brought the conflict to new heights in the current stage of 2015 when Russia entered the fold.

Similar to Iran, Russia has maintained a shared interest and unwavering support of al-Assad for many years, so they became involved in Syrian politics slowly in the years leading up to 2015. For example, when Assad first took steps into a violent conflict in 2011 and 2012, Russia used its veto at “the United Nations Security Council in 2011-2012 derailed attempts by Assad’s western and regional enemies to UN sanctions while sending aid and helping Syria bypass the economic sanctions western powers unilaterally imposed”²⁰. This speaks to earlier concerns within this background guide regarding the effectiveness of the Security Council and the veto power within the structure as such actions taken against the Assad regime would’ve changed the landscape of the civil war and the human rights abuses that occurred.

On September 30, 2015, Russia worked with Iran to begin deploying air assaults against Syrian rebel bases, and this not only was this a direct involvement in the war, more so than just supplying weapons or soldiers, but it completely changed the course of the civil war. Assad’s regime had been struggling, if not losing, for many years, but Russia’s air attacks allowed Assad to win important victories¹⁵. This was Russia’s first involvement in direct military action outside its borders since the end of the Cold War, and it not only shifted the conflict itself in

²⁰ Phillips, Christopher. “The international system and the Syrian civil war.” *SageJournals*, May 24, 2022.

Syria but caused massive waves to the global world order as humanitarian aid organizations and other countries condemned Russia's attacks on civilians. For example, according to various activist groups, Russia's airstrikes and direct military involvement "has also claimed the lives of more than 1,700 civilians"²¹ and for a few weeks at the end of 2015, Russia even deployed ground troops to fight in Syria. This increased tension with other nations involved in the conflict as President Putin claimed that "Russia is ready to scale up its military intervention in Syria less than one day after Moscow signed off on an ambitious UN plan to end the war"¹⁸. This instance shows an additional lack of respect or reverence for the purposes of the United Nations and the Security Council, whose members are supposed to be the leaders in promoting international peace and security. However, Russia as a permanent member did not follow this mission statement, and while it has faced severe backlash to its actions, there has yet to be any deliberate action taken against Russia for its involvement.

More than four million refugees have left Syria by 2015 due to the civil war and millions more have been displaced from their homes as a result of the escalating conflict. The UN Security Council has still not enacted the sanctions and ramifications against Assad that were then intended due to the inefficient structure and Russia's ability to veto. Furthermore, Russia's direct involvement in 2015 raised the stakes within the conflict, and "with proxy wars now more common than inter-state conflicts...the multipolar global system in which we now live will see an increase in civil wars in regions that are also multipolar"¹⁷ in the Middle East. This is an extremely important topic that must be discussed with sensitivity by the members of this committee in order to prevent further Russian or Western national involvement in future civil wars and regional conflicts, whether it is in a proxy war capacity or in direct military action.

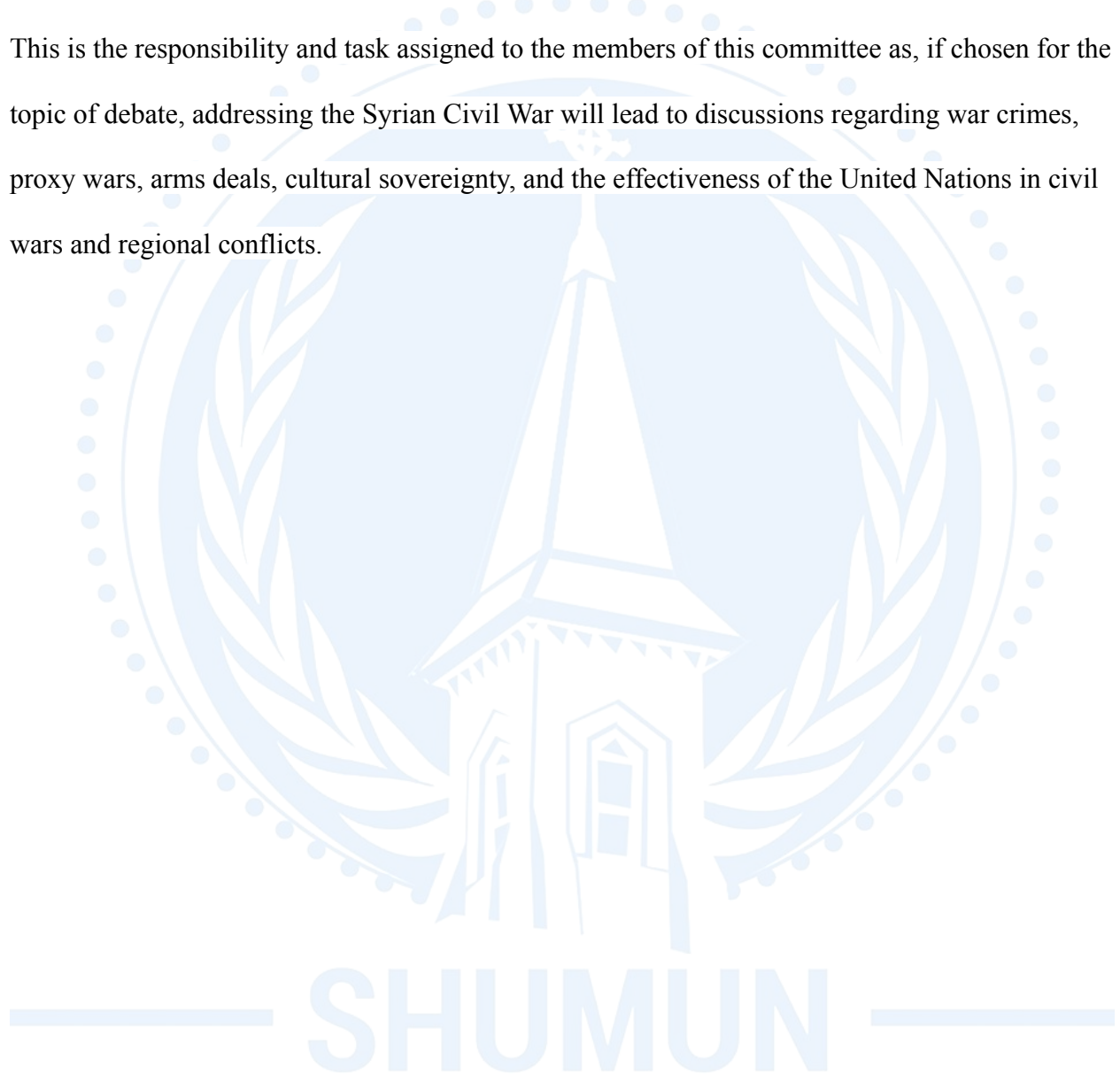
²¹ Quinn, Ben. "Russia's military action in Syria - timeline." *The Guardian*, March 14, 2016.

Additionally, it is important to note the role that art and social media played during the Syrian Civil War, particularly in regard to spreading awareness amongst activists and creating a space for empowerment. Having started with graffiti sprayed by young activists, the Syrian Civil War often had chants, slogans, and art that represented the movement, similar to trends that occurred throughout the Arab Springs as this was the first time a revolution was televised internationally. This form of expression allowed activists to call out the Assad regime for its oppression, and “in the first days of the revolution, a *dabke*, a traditional folk dance common to the Levant, was written and performed, going viral on social media”²². The performance of this *dabke*, both back then and today, was extremely significant and symbolic “not just for underpinning social solidarity through a recognizable culturally embedded dance, but also its use against a regime that has historically attempted to make claims of Arab Nationalist leadership”¹⁷. Throughout history, the importance of protecting art and culture in the context of complicated ethnopolitical landscapes has often gone overlooked, but this is an incredible example of individuals using elements of their culture for expression and activism. It is the responsibility of the United Nations and the Security Council to not only protect the safety and sovereignty of nations but also the cultural identities of all communities, particularly historically oppressed or underrepresented groups.

The Syrian Civil War is a complicated case study of the complexity of regional conflicts, particularly in regard to the ethno-political landscape of post-colonial states and communities. This was further amplified by the interference of outside Western actors such as the United States and Russia within the conflict as not only did they try to support their chosen side, either the Assad regime or the revolutionaries, but also they used this conflict as a means to pursue their

²² Delatolla, Andrew. “Ten Years of Syrian Revolutionary Narratives and Repertoires.” *Northern Notes - the University of Leeds*, May 12, 2021.

own goals in regards to global dominance and power in the world order by means of using the fighting as a proxy for bigger issues. These malicious intentions in addition to the crimes against humanity and civilians committed by the Assad regime and the Russian military must be charged and met with severe punishments in order to better protect endangered communities in the future. This is the responsibility and task assigned to the members of this committee as, if chosen for the topic of debate, addressing the Syrian Civil War will lead to discussions regarding war crimes, proxy wars, arms deals, cultural sovereignty, and the effectiveness of the United Nations in civil wars and regional conflicts.



Questions to Consider for Topic B

1. What justifies other countries intervening in the Middle East during times of civil unrest, if anything justifies intervention at all?
2. How were the various ethnic and religious minorities affected by the Arab Springs within their states? What could international organizations and states do better to protect the cultural sovereignty of ethnic and religious minorities?
3. What are the prospects for a resolution to the Syrian Civil War, considering the ongoing challenges and involvement of external powers?
4. What actions did the United Nations take to address the Syrian Civil War, and what were the limitations of its interventions (what did and did not work, what could be improved?)
5. How did the Arab Spring in 2011 contribute to the Syrian Civil War in 2014-2015, and what were the broader regional implications?
6. To what extent did the involvement of external powers contribute to the complexity of the issue, and Middle Eastern/Arab geopolitics and tensions?
7. What challenges did the United Nations face in addressing a conflict with multiple external actors supporting different factions?
8. How did the effects of social media/media play a role in the Arab Spring? Take into consideration the arts, dances, songs, and chants.

Positions

1. Syria
2. Ukraine
3. Turkiye
4. United States of America
5. China
6. Rwanda
7. Spain
8. Republic of Korea
9. Argentina
10. Australia
11. Iran
12. France
13. Luxembourg
14. Saudi Arabia
15. Qatar
16. Angola
17. Malaysia
18. Tunisia
19. Libya
20. Kenya
21. Egypt
22. Venezuela
23. New Zealand
24. Iraq
25. Israel
26. Romania
27. Belgium
28. Canada
29. Colombia
30. Paraguay
31. Uruguay
32. Bolivia
33. Ecuador
34. Kyrgyzstan
35. Nigeria
36. Namibia
37. South Sudan
38. Ethiopia
39. Botswana
40. South Africa
41. Zimbabwe
42. Bosnia and Herzegovina
43. Croatia
44. Switzerland
45. Germany
46. United Kingdom
47. Palestine
48. Afghanistan
49. Pakistan
50. Poland
51. Slovenia
52. Sudan
53. Lebanon
54. Greece
55. Italy
56. Belarus
57. Moldova
58. Lithuania
59. Slovakia
60. India
61. Japan
62. Panama
63. Mexico
64. Oman
65. United Arab Emirates
66. Yemen
67. Kuwait
68. Bahrain
69. Brazil
70. Thailand
71. Mongolia
72. Kazakhstan
73. The Philippines
74. Nepal
75. Jordan
76. Bangladesh

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