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United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

Novice Committee

Chair: Joshua Li

Co-Chair: Kai Chen

Committee Description

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the principal organs of the United Nations, responsible for maintaining international peace and security. It comprises 15 member states, including five permanent members with veto power (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and ten non-permanent members elected for two-year terms. The UNSC makes decisions on a wide range of security-related issues, including the authorization of military interventions, sanctions, and peacekeeping operations, to prevent conflicts and resolve international disputes.

Topic 1: North Korea's Expanding Nuclear Program

Introduction

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In 2023, North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un announced plans to expand North Korea's nuclear program exponentially. This includes increasing the number of nuclear weapon tests, augmenting the size of the arsenal, and advancing the creation of a new weapon—the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM). In a speech on January 1st, 2023, Kim Jong Un proclaimed that these weapons would be used to target South Korea and would serve as a "quick nuclear counterstrike" against South Korea's "preparations for war" and "worrying military moves" by the United States.

History

North Korea had pursued active nuclear research since the 1950s, but it wasn't until the 1970s that the regime began to seriously develop a nuclear program. The work progressed largely in part due to the Soviet Union, which helped train North Korean scientists and technicians in the USSR in 1956.

As North Korea's nuclear threat increases in size, the world has continuously sought to prevent its advance. Since 1991, the United States has attempted to convince Pyongyang to halt its nuclear program, but that has failed. Then they tried cooperation and failed too. Finally, tensions heightened in June 1994 as North Korea shut down its nuclear reactor in Yongbyon and began removing fuel rods, which indicates enough plutonium to make five or six bombs. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which was denied full access to North Korea's nuclear sites, turned the situation into the hands of the United Nations Security Council. Seeing this as a pressing issue, the United States started rounding up votes to impose economic

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sanctions on Pyongyang. Understanding that North Korea interpreted sanctions as "declarations of war," President Bill Clinton decided to dispatch military troops to South Korea with the prospect of going to war. While the war never happened, tensions have continued to rise ever since.

Current Situation

As of December 19, 2023, North Korea has tested six nuclear weapons, each one progressively increasing in magnitude. In April 2018, North Korea announced that it had achieved its goal and would no longer test nuclear weapons. However, North Korea continued to produce fissile material (plutonium and highly enriched uranium), which are key components in nuclear weapons. According to experts, North Korea had produced enough fissile material for 50 to 70 warheads.

The most pressing issue, however, is not how many nuclear missiles North Korea has but rather how far they can hit. North Korea has continuously developed its intercontinental ballistic missiles, with 1 test in 2017, 1 test in 2022, and 4 tests in 2023. North Korea claims that one of its missiles, the Hwasong-15, developed in 2017, can reach ranges of 13,000km with "pinpoint accuracy." Should this be true, the Hwasong-15 would be able to hit anywhere in North America, from Washington, D.C., to New York City.

Important Actors and Their Interests

United States:

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The biggest opposing factor and threat to North Korea is, undoubtedly, the United States. Since the 1970s, the US has always been trying to suppress the nuclear program in North Korea. The most notable event of this effort occurred in 2019, as President Donald Trump became the first sitting American commander-in-chief to set foot in North Korea for a diplomatic discussion with Kim Jong-Un. This was the closest America had ever come to reaching peace and agreement with North Korea. The two leaders agreed to restart negotiations on a long-elusive nuclear agreement, and as quoted by Donald Trump himself, "stepping across that line was a great honor. A lot of progress has been made, and a lot of friendships have been made." However, diplomatic relations have fallen off ever since and have yet to be picked back up.

South Korea:

As the biggest target and long-time nemesis of North Korea, South Korea plays an important role in this nuclear tension struggle. With North Korea's expanding nuclear program and China's strained relationship with the United States, South Korean officials have begun pondering if South Korea should pursue nuclear weapons as well. Several members of the conservative People Power Party (PPP) are calling for the country to seriously consider acquiring nuclear weapons.

Questions to Consider

1. Will suppressing North Korea's nuclear program make them more hostile? If so, what other measures can be taken?

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2. Should South Korea pursue a nuclear defense program?
3. How does the Ukrainian war affect North Korea and its nuclear weapons?
4. Where does North Korea's nuclear program stand now? How will it progress in the future?
5. Would Kim Jong-un use his nuclear weapons?

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Topic 2: South China Sea Dispute

Introduction

The South China Sea is located in the Pacific Ocean, stretching from Singapore to the Strait of Malacca to the Strait of Taiwan. The region has attracted significant international attention due

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to its deep-rooted historical territorial disagreements, popular trade routes, and strategic location, resulting in ongoing geopolitical tensions.

The territorial disputes in the South China Sea have been going on for many years. This issue involves over seven different countries brawling for more control over territory. The disputes surround claimed territorial waters and economic zones, as well as island chains. The region is contested due to a few key reasons. Firstly, the area holds a vast number of natural resources, such as oil and fish. Secondly, the South China Sea is crucial for trade as it serves as a major trade route. Thirdly, the area is used for maintaining the security of bordering member states. Due to all these reasons, territorial disputes have repeatedly led to colliding claims of sovereignty.

History

Territorial disputes in the South China Sea have been prevalent since the 1970s and have become increasingly contested since 2013. In 2009, Vietnam and Malaysia issued a joint statement accusing the People's Republic of China of disregarding the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and infringing on other states' sovereignty. Meanwhile, the People's Republic of China has been making historic claims to various island chains in the South China Sea as Chinese sovereign territory due to illegal invasion and military occupation by France and Japan. The Chinese government has remained steadfastly defiant in its defense of China's sovereignty over the South China Sea.

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Current Situation

In recent years, satellite imagery has shown China's increased efforts to reclaim land in the South China Sea by physically increasing the size of islands or creating new islands altogether. In addition to piling sand onto existing reefs, China has constructed ports, military installations, and airstrips. This has raised concerns among neighboring countries and has led to increased militarization. To protect its political, security, and economic interests in the region, the United States has challenged China's assertive territorial claims and land reclamation efforts by conducting FONPs and bolstering support for Southeast Asian partners. Also, in response to China's assertive presence in the disputed territory, Japan has sold military ships and equipment to the Philippines and Vietnam to improve their maritime security capacity and deter Chinese aggression.

Important Actors and Their Interests

Since 2012, China has adopted a more assertive stance towards the South China Sea, particularly towards Vietnam and the Philippines, featuring short cycles of aggressive policies followed by assuaging actions. China faces numerous, but highly divided, rival East Asian claimants for territory in the South China Sea. China is pushed by its interests in raw resources such as oil and fish, as well as the strategic control of important shipping lanes. Furthermore, China believes that this territory is rightfully theirs due to history.

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Vietnam wishes to internationalize the disputes as its territorial claims over the South China Sea are substantial and are openly in competition with China's demands. So far, strong economic and political ties have prevented any escalation from happening.

The United States claims that it seeks to preserve peace and stability, upholding the freedom of the seas in a manner consistent with international law. They wish to maintain the unimpeded flow of commerce and oppose any attempt to use coercion or force to settle disputes.

Key Terms

Territorial Claims: These refer to the assertions made by various countries in regard to sovereignty over specific islands, reefs, shoals, and maritime features.

Nine-Dash Line: China's historical claim to almost the entire South China Sea is often represented by a U-shaped boundary line on maps, originally consisting of nine dashes.

Exclusive Economic Zone: An area prescribed by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea over which a coastal state has special rights regarding the exploration and use of maritime resources.

Freedom of Navigation: The principle that ships flying the flag of any sovereign state shall not suffer interference from other states while navigating through seas.

Questions to Consider

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1. What historical events and factors have contributed to the current territorial disputes in the South China Sea? How do historical claims shape the perspectives of the countries involved?
2. How does international law apply to the South China Sea dispute?
3. What are the geopolitical interests of the countries involved?
4. What are the security implications of the militarization of the South China Sea, including the construction of artificial islands, the deployment of naval vessels, and the establishment of military facilities?

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