SECURITY COUNCIL

1. THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

TOPIC OVERVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

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The Security Council will be discussing the situation in the Middle East, focusing on three subjects in particular:

1. The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
2. The Regional Rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia
3. The Protection of Civilians during Armed Conflict

This file will provide some background information on each of these topics and provide sources that should regularly be consulted, as the situation in the Middle East is constantly developing and debate will be based on current events as opposed to historical issues.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The decades-long conflict between Israel and Palestine has often drawn in the outside world, particularly other Arab and/or majority Muslim countries, the United States of America, and European powers. This video is a good introduction to the history of the conflict and major developments throughout it. The conflict has cost many lives and is still causing major problems, which will be discussed below. Sources that should regularly be consulted to keep updated on current events include Haaretz, Al Jazeera, Israel Hayom, Wafa, and others that may be easily found online. It is important to remember when conducting research on this issue that narratives play a very big role, and that sources will treat and interpret the same incident very differently; this is why the sources suggested above fall on a spectrum of views and why all of them should be consulted. Some issues that are currently relevant and might be discussed include:

1. The current situation in Gaza, including the living conditions, the protests taking place and the violence associated with them, its governance, the status of Hamas, which is considered a terrorist group by several western governments, and the effects of the above on vulnerable people, particularly children that make up a very large percentage of the population.
2. A new set of steps towards a peace process, or at least a ceasefire.
3. The unilateral recognitions of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and what that means for the future (see here, here, here, and here).
4. The role of the United Nations: see UN News on Palestinian Issues, the Middle East in general, and the issue of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine, which is charged with providing healthcare, education, and other basic services to Palestinian refugees and might soon be unable to carry out those tasks.

The discussion will however be informed by recent events and will not necessarily follow the above points.

The Regional Rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran, two major Middle Eastern powers, are on opposing sides of several conflicts in the Middle East, including:

- The conflict in Yemen, where Iran supports the Houthis, who are rebelling against the Yemeni government, which is supported by Saudi Arabia;
- The conflict in Syria, where Iran supports the government, and Saudi Arabia supports the opposition;

- The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in which Iran has, in the past, supported Hamas (it is unclear whether it is still doing so), and Saudi Arabia is increasingly improving its relations with Israel (in which the United States of America is playing a major role);
- The Qatar – Gulf Cooperation Council crisis, in which Saudi Arabia and its allies ended diplomatic relations with Qatar, citing its relations with Iran as one of the reasons;
- Various crises in Lebanon, the most recent one being the (now withdrawn) resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri, allegedly under pressure from Saudi Arabia; meanwhile Hezbollah, a Lebanese military and political group is a long-term ally of Iran;
- Several other past and minor conflicts, such as their involvement in the Gulf Wars, sectarian instability in Pakistan, the war in Afghanistan, and the Arab Spring in certain countries.

Following the Second World War, both Saudi Arabia and Iran were allies of the United States of America, the former already under the current Al-Saud regime, the latter governed by Shah Pahlavi, a dictator installed by the USA. Following the 1979 Iranian revolution, which installed the current Islamic government, tension began to emerge between Saudi Arabia, which was still an important ally to the USA (largely but not solely due to its recently discovered petroleum), and Iran, which was now openly hostile to the USA. The tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia can also be traced back to sectarian tensions (Saudi Arabia's government being Sunni and Iran's Shia), and competition in the field of rhetorical influence over Muslims worldwide, as each government claims to be the legitimate authority on Islam. Naturally, the following decades and prolonged conflict mean that relations have been frayed even further.

This session of Security Council will seek to improve relations between these two regional powers and use their influence to hopefully improve the situation of some of the conflicts listed above.

The Protection of Civilians during Armed Conflict

This part of the Security Council session will seek to address the issue of protecting civilians during armed conflict, focusing particularly on the Middle East. International humanitarian law, particularly the 1949 Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocols set out guidelines for the protection of civilians (persons who are not members of armed forces or armed groups), including their humane treatment, their protection from degrading treatment, including unfair trials and torture. The Geneva Conventions also require states to allow groups trying to help civilians (e.g. by providing medical aid or humanitarian relief) to access those needing aid. Read more details about how international humanitarian law protect civilians during armed conflict here, here, here, and here. Although international humanitarian law dates back further than that, many of the documents that are applicable today were formed after the Second World War. However, since their formation, there have been innumerable cases where these laws have not been followed and where civilians have been harmed, including several ongoing conflicts.

Delegates are advised to read up on the War in Yemen, the Syrian Civil War, the Situations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Sinai Insurgency, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the Turkish-Kurdish conflict (see sources listed above for information and news); all of these situations in the Middle East have seen civilian casualties, with the conflicts in Yemen and Syria being particularly deadly. In many cases, it is particularly the lack of humanitarian aid and resources reaching civilians that is harmful; Yemen, for example, is currently facing a major famine. While it is difficult to enforce humanitarian law during armed conflict, especially in territories that are controlled by groups that are not parties to the Geneva Conventions, such as the Islamic State, it is important to create new measures and incentives to achieve the implementation of international law in this field.

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