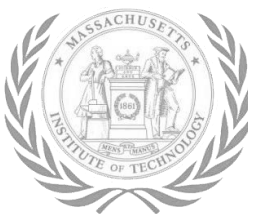


2013

# UNSC 2013

## BACKGROUND GUIDE

MIT MODEL UNITED NATIONS  
CONFERENCE V



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## LETTER FROM THE DAIS

Delegates to the Security Council of MITMUNC 2013,

On behalf of the staff of the fifth MIT Model United Nations Conference, we would like to welcome you to the United Nations Security Council committee. We have selected two topics for this committee that we hope will bring some great debate - the current conflict in Syria and international security implications of emerging diseases. We hope that one abstract and one concrete topic should offer a good variety of debate. Please also be sure to read the "Information about this Committee" section for information about how this committee will differ with normal MITMUNC committees.

I am Albert Wang. I was in the class of 2012 and majored in computer science and with a concentration in international relations. Now, I am a software engineer at Ginkgo Bioworks, a synthetic biology startup in South Boston. This is my fifth year involved in MITMUNC - in the past, I have been in almost every position at MITMUNC from crisis actor to hotel security to Secretary-General. This year, I'm coming out of "retirement" to chair and be the crisis director of my favorite committee, the UN Security Council.

Hi, I'm Kathryn Buggs and I am a freshman here at MIT. I'm originally from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and participated in many Model UN conferences while I was in high school. I hope to major in mathematics or economics and would love to work at the real United Nations someday.

We look forward to seeing you in chilly February to solve the problems of Syria and biological security. If you have any questions about the committee, please contact us at the email below.

Sincerely,

*Albert Wang*

*Kathryn Buggs*

UNSC Chairs,  
MITMUNC V,  
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## INFORMATION ABOUT THIS COMMITTEE

The MITMUNC UN Security Council committee will be run as a crisis committee. For those of you not familiar with crisis committees, this means that every so often, the chairs will simulate events that you will need to respond to in order to test how effectively you can react to changing circumstances. These crises will of course be related to the topics that we have given you. Therefore, the Security Council committee will be less about how much research you have done beforehand and more about how fast and accurately you can react to new events.

Also, crises are typically negative developments in the simulated world. If any crises are targeting your country, take it as a complement - the chairs feel you need a challenge.

Due to problems with logistics, we will not be having a midnight crisis this year.

Please also read the Preparation section on the MITMUNC website at <http://www.mitmunc.org/preparation>.

We are expecting a single one page position paper covering both topics. In your position paper, please also state which topic you would prefer to debate first in committee.

Since we expect that most of the debate in committee to revolve around crises, we will be modifying the rules of procedure to allow for more fluid debate as follows:

- The chairs will be entertaining private messages to home government. These allow you to communicate with your home government (i.e. your country's head of state/government and/or cabinet) and ask for advice on what stances you should take on issues or to ask your home government to implement a plan of action. The chairs may also preemptively issue messages from home government as part of a crisis.
- We will be using communiqués instead of normal working papers and resolutions. Communiqués are messages from the committee to any particular organization or to the public (i.e. a press release) expressing the desire of the committee as a whole. They must be passed by a majority vote like resolutions, though there are no limits for the number sent.
- The Permanent Five (P5) countries (China, France, Russia, UK, USA) will retain their right to veto resolutions and communiqués.
- We will be conducting all debate in permanent moderated caucus format. There will be no speakers lists. We will also entertain unmoderated caucuses and round robin debates (i.e. where every delegate is given the same amount of time to present his or her country's position)

**Topic 1:****SITUATION IN SYRIA  
COMMITTEE  
INTRODUCTION**

*Note: Given the current dynamic status of Syria, we will be freezing time starting from November 1. Therefore, the committee will be debating the situation of Syria as of November 1, no matter what events have happened or will happen between then and the conference in February.*

**Topic Description**

Conflict in Syria has grown from initially peaceful protests into a full-blown civil war with international repercussions.

Now, both the rebels and the government have equally tenuous positions and both are trying to destroy each other in open conflict with bombs instead of words.

More than any other revolution associated with the Arab Spring, the conflict in Syria poses greater challenges to the international community; with a divided UN Security Council, fiscal uncertainty in Europe, and tumultuous elections in the United States, there is little appetite for international intervention. It may, however, be required to keep the conflict between a government armed with chemical weapons and an increasingly radical opposition from spilling over into Lebanon and Turkey. How can the world keep Syria from devolving into a failed state?

**Historical Background**

Much of the political turmoil in Syria stems from the ethnic divide between the

ruling Alawite minority and the Sunni majority. Alawites are believed to account for about 12% of Syria's population, but their exact beliefs, practices, and numbers remain secret in keeping with the Shia practice of taqiyya, or concealing one's beliefs to avoid persecution. Alawites share many beliefs of Shi'ite Islam, but they are also thought to incorporate aspects of Christianity and are often criticized by orthodox Sunnis for their liberal practices. Alawites, unlike Sunnis, regard the five Pillars of Islam as symbols and therefore do not observe them as rigorously.

The history of the current regime is one of instability and strife. Hafez al-Assad, father of current President Bashar al-Assad, assumed power in 1970 after a bloodless coup within the ruling Ba'ath party. Shortly thereafter, he removed the constitutional requirement that the president be Muslim and faced subsequent accusations of leading an atheist regime.

In 1980, after the Islamic Revolution during which Ayatollah Khomeini gained control of Iran and enacted strict sharia law, Muslim groups in Syria began rioting in several cities and Assad subsequently began to emphasize Syria's devotion to Islam. In the same year, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood attempted to assassinate Assad. In early 1982, the Muslim Brotherhood led an uprising in Hama, which was suppressed by the military. In 2000, Hafez al-Assad died and Bashar assumed the post of President; the Muslim Brotherhood, which had been outlawed for twenty years, declared its intention to resume political activity.

During the early parts of his presidency, Assad acquiesced to calls for the release of political prisoners and easing of media restrictions. It seemed for a short time as though Syria might be moving toward a less restrictive political and social climate.

Within a year of his election, however, restrictions on the press were put back in place and Assad transitioned from his election ideals of democracy and economic development to the hard-line authoritarian policies of his father's regime.

## **Relationships with Other Nations**

Syria's relationships with other governments, especially those of its geographical neighbors, are varied: some support the opposition while others back the regime, and most are struggling with the surge of almost half a million refugees fleeing the violence in Syria.

Relations with Turkey have been strained for most of the last century, due to disputes over land and water supplies. In retaliation for Turkey's damming of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the 1970s, President Hafez al-Assad granted Kurdish nationalists refuge in Syria. The Kurds are an ethnic group that has long sought independence from Syria, and the alliance of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) with Syria adds to tensions. Relations improved some in 1999 when Syria handed over PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan to Turkey and even more in 2003 when Syria and Turkey shared mutual opposition to the US invasion of Iraq.

Since the beginning of the Arab Spring, however, relations have soured. Turkey's Prime Minister defended the Syrian opposition's calls for democracy and the influx of Syrian refugees over the Turkish border is straining both resources and relations.

Russia is more supportive of the Assad regime than most other countries, due in part to the Syrian military's dependence on Russian contracts for its weapons supply. In June of 2012, Russia blocked western nations from establishing a transitional government without Assad, and it has repeatedly used its Security Council veto power to prevent UN action against the regime.

Although they differ greatly, Iran and Syria have enjoyed a strong partnership in their resistance against common enemies. Both felt threatened by the American military presence in Iraq, and they stand united in support of Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. In a Middle East in which Iran is increasingly isolated from its neighbors, Syria remains a strong ally.

Syrian troops have occupied much of Lebanon for the past few decades and Syria has a major influence over Lebanon's political and foreign affairs. Violence in one country occasionally spills over into the next, and fighters from the Hezbollah political party of Lebanon have been accused of fighting in Syria on behalf of the Syrian government. Lebanon is also absorbing many of the Syrian refugees fleeing the violence.

Relations between Israel and Syria have been marked by periods of hostility since the middle of the last century, culminating



in the violent disputes from 1967 to 1974 over the Golan Heights region between the two nations. Tensions are running high now, because shelling from Syria occasionally crosses the border into Israel and leads to Israeli retaliation.

### **Military Capabilities**

Syria is believed to possess one of the strongest chemical weapons programs in the Middle East, as well as one of the largest arsenals of ballistic missiles. It does have one small nuclear research reactor and is known to harbor nuclear weapons ambitions, but at this point in time does not have the resources and technology necessary to become a nuclear threat. In 2007, Israel conducted an airstrike on what the Syrian government claimed was an unused military compound; an IAEA investigation after the strike concluded that the building was very likely a nuclear reactor. Much of Syria's desire to acquire nuclear weapons stems from its hostilities with Israel, although use of any weapons, be they nuclear, chemical, or biological, could have adverse effects on Syrians, what with Israel and Israeli-occupied Golan Height's geographical proximity to Syria.

### **Present Status Up to November 1**

The Arab Spring, which started in December 2010 when a Tunisian fruit seller set himself on fire to protest unfair police treatment, has prompted pro-democracy rebellion across the Middle East and toppled the tyrannical regimes of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. Like in Tunisia and Egypt, protests in Syria escalated and have led to nearly two years

of bloody civil war, with some sources reporting nearly 40,000 deaths and almost half a million refugees displaced into neighboring countries.

The opposition in Syria is fractious and divided. A mix of political dissidents, grassroots activists, religious extremists, and armed militants, it struggles to define a common goal and form a cohesive plan for ousting President al-Assad. In October 2011, several of the opposition groups united to form the Syrian National Council (SNC), whose aim was to offer a credible alternative to the Assad regime and serve as a single point of contact for other nations and organizations. Another coalition of opposition groups, the National Co-ordination Committee (NCC), differed from the SNC in its willingness to engage in dialogue with the regime, where the SNC aimed to overthrow the regime by any and all legal means. The Free Syrian Army (FSA), which is made up mostly of Syrian army deserters, has been at the forefront of the opposition, leading attacks against government and military strongholds and occasionally taking control of isolated parts of the country. The FSA relies on outside sources, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and sympathetic neighboring nations, for weapons. In contrast to the secular FSA, the Syrian Liberation Front is a coalition of strong militant groups with Islamist agendas. Altogether, the myriad opposition groups in Syria possess the strength and skill to challenge the Syrian government's military crackdown; their lack of coordination, however, continues to be their biggest challenge.

*Major Events in Civil War*

In March 2011, protests began to spread across Syria with protesters among other things demanding the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad. These demonstrations eventually stretched from Daara in the largely Sunni area of the southwest to the Kurdish areas in the northeast, the urban Sunni strongholds of Hama and Homs, and Aleppo and the suburbs of Damascus. Although it initially issued public statements to address the protests, the Assad regime soon resorted to military force including airstrikes and ground operations to crush the dissents.

The conflict has since grown into a full-blown civil war with supporters of President Assad, like the Syrian military and security forces, fighting against rebel forces throughout the country, including the capital of Damascus and Syria's largest city of Aleppo. Civilians throughout Syria have been caught in the cross-fire, with tens of thousands reportedly killed and hundreds of thousands being displaced within the country or seeking shelter in neighboring countries, such as Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey. In April 2012, the United Nations deployed an observer mission to Syria to monitor a shaky ceasefire. The mission, which was named United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS), was headed up by international envoy Kofi Annan and initially scheduled to last 90 days. After the monitors were prevented from traveling freely and fired upon in some locations, however, the patrols were suspended in June and Mr. Annan resigned in early 2012. Although he was replaced by Lakhdar Brahimi, the United Nations decided not to extend the

mission's mandate later that month. Mr. Brahimi eventually mediated another ceasefire proposal for the suspension of military operations from October 26 through 29 in conjunction with the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha. While the Syrian government and various rebel groups agreed to this proposal, fighting actually continued during this time and resulted in numerous associated casualties.

**UN Involvement**

The United Nations intervention in Syria has been controversial and complex. The two largest UN undertakings in Syria have been carried out by the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS).

The UNDOF, chartered in 1974 to maintain a ceasefire between Israeli and Syrian forces in the Golan Heights, works to enforce a demilitarized stretch of the border between Israel and Syria and, with respect to the violence in Syria, endeavors to keep fighting between Syrian civilians and security forces out of the Golan Heights. Perhaps more well known than UNDOF is UNSMIS, which was established in April 2012 and intended to operate for 90 days to monitor a ceasefire within Syria and assist with the implementation of Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan's six-point plan to end the conflict. Hostilities slowed initially, but escalated in June 2012, which led to the temporary suspension of USMIS operations. Its mission was extended for an additional 30 days, with the idea that any further extension would be permissible only if the violence decreased to a level at which USMIS monitors could

effectively implement their mandate. Violence obviously did not cease within that time frame, and the USMIS mission ended in August 2012.

### Country Blocs

#### *Pro-opposition*

France, Germany, Portugal, United Kingdom, and United States adamantly support opposition efforts to overthrow the Assad regime. They have attempted to pass UNSC resolutions calling for an end to violence on both sides, condemning human rights violations by the government, and promoting the proposed six-point plan to cease the violence.

#### *Neutral*

Several countries, particularly those that are not permanent members of the UNSC, maintain relatively neutral positions on the crisis in Syria. They are generally in favor of condemning human rights violations and negotiating an end to the violence, but their stances on what sort of political reforms are necessary and how foreign intervention should be used to force Assad out of power are not as clearly defined or concrete as those held by pro-opposition or pro-Assad states. The divide among the neutral states is more or less geographical: liberal Western states versus conservative Eastern states. Azerbaijan and Pakistan tend more to align with Russia and China, while Colombia, Germany, and India often side with the pro-opposition states.

#### *Pro-Assad*

A few countries on the Security Council, namely China and Russia, feel that foreign intervention in Syria is unacceptable. They use their veto power to reject resolutions that would declare the illegitimacy of the Assad regime and condemn the military's violence against civilians. Russia, for one, believes that Syria's importance in the Middle East makes maintaining stability of the utmost importance and it says that because the conflict does not at this time pose an international threat, foreign intervention is not justified.

### Questions to Consider

How can outside nations choose which side to support, when it is really trying to pick the lesser of two evils: an opposition that is increasingly more radical and less secular or a government that is more and more willing to brutalize its own people?

What can the UNSC do to prevent weapons of mass destruction from falling into the wrong hands in Syria, and how can it ensure that Syria breaks from its current modus operandi of disregarding IAEA regulations?

How can the UNSC work to ensure that violence within Syria does not spill over into other countries, such as Turkey and Israel?

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<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/misions/unsmis/>



UN Disengagement Observer Force  
<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/mis-sions/undof/>

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**Topic 2:****INTERNATIONAL  
SECURITY  
IMPLICATIONS OF  
EMERGING DISEASES  
COMMITTEE****Introduction**

My plan for this topic is for the committee to debate the security implications of emerging diseases. Although this topic may seem more appropriate for the World Health Organization, a severe epidemic will affect international security and human rights. Emerging diseases have the possibility to start epidemics because they are unknown. Therefore, the debate in this committee should be centered around political instead of scientific solutions to contagious diseases. This guide has a section about the scientific background of epidemics which, along with common sense, should be sufficient for debate.

We realize that this topic is pretty ambiguous but we plan on this topic to be focused on crisis solving rather than general policy debate.

**Topic Description**

There are many human diseases that are severe enough to pose an international security problem. Many types of diseases, including variants of flu, break out occasionally and infect large populations causing major strain on public health facilities. So far, they have been dealt with by national governments with minor coordination by international bodies.

Nevertheless, with new emerging diseases in developing regions such as Africa and southeastern Asia, the possibility increases that new natural or man-made disease outbreaks may cause governments to react overreact or underreact in violation of human rights. The question the Security Council will need to solve is how far should the international community go to protect public health as opposed to the preservation of international norms like equal access to medicine and free movement of people and goods across borders.

**Historical Background**

Natural contagious diseases have always afflicted man. Since contagious diseases are dependent on their hosts for survival, the severity of contagious diseases is roughly correlated with the number and concentration of their hosts. With rapidly increasing human populations in the last few hundred years, this only means that the probability of severe epidemics has increased. This section will explore the effects of two historical and two modern epidemics and the scientific background of spread, detection, treatment, and prevention of contagious diseases.

The Bubonic Plague of the 14th century is one of the most well-known disease outbreaks in human history. Several million inhabitants of Europe and the Near East died due to a disease carried by rodents. In total, possibly a half of Europe's population died due to this disease. With such a high casualty rate, the Black Plague certainly had political and economic effects outside of the typical medical effects of a normal disease.

The Crimean War in the mid 1800s had a lesser known epidemic than the Bubonic Plague but it certainly changed the course of the war. While thousands died from combat, the majority of deaths in the Crimean War was due to cholera. Cholera infected the water supplies in the Crimean peninsula and killed hundreds of thousands of soldiers on both sides of the war. Had either side overcome the effects of cholera by proper sanitation, that side would likely have won the war. By killing off thousands of people, contagious diseases have an effect on international peace and security.

More recently, outbreaks of H1N1 and H5N1 (swine and bird, respectively) flu have required international coordination to mitigate. Both of these types of flu are naturally carried by animals but later mutated to spread between humans.

Though neither outbreak was severe enough to pose a threat to security, both resulted in the loss of millions of dollars in economic output. Flu in particular highlights the fact that contagious diseases are not only limited to humans. Both of these types of flu started off in animals before spreading to humans. Therefore, the challenge of contagious disease expands to include the movement of domesticated and wild animals.

Possibly the most severe of modern outbreaks was that of SARS coronavirus. The SARS outbreak in 2003 highlights the importance of international cooperation in combatting contagious diseases. Before the original outbreak, SARS was a totally uncharacterized disease with no known cure. Combined with the fact that the first

infections were in highly populated southern Chinese cities, SARS could have resulted in massive repercussions had the Chinese government not responded effectively - when SARS was first recognized, the Chinese government quarantined whole hospitals that had treated SARS patients while also censoring the media on SARS developments. Later, after SARS started spreading to other countries, the Chinese government started cooperating with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the US Center for Disease Control (CDC). This approach, though it worked in this particular case, could have turned out much worse if SARS spread more easily.

Also, the initial reaction of the Chinese government - wholesale quarantines and media censorship - could be viewed as unethical if not a minor human rights violation.

## Scientific Background

In order to effectively combat epidemics, decision makers should know the scientific basis on which strategy should be formed.

Very generally, diseases have two main properties, contagiousness and lethality, both of which will affect how severe an outbreak of the disease will be.

Contagiousness refers to how easily the disease is transmitted from one person to another. Cancer, while deadly, is not contagious (except in certain cases) and therefore is not a concern from an international security point of view. The main factor determining the contagiousness of a disease is how it is transmitted (i.e. the disease vectors):

inhalation, ingestion, cutaneous, absorption, and/or through a animal (e.g. mosquitoes or fleas). Also important, especially for emerging diseases, is what non-human animals are also susceptible to the disease, thus allowing the disease to spread through a third party. Lethality is simply the prognosis (possibility of fatality in a given time period) of a typical individual that is infected with the disease.

In general, public health doctrine regarding epidemics calls for taking steps to reduce new infections and triaging those who are already infected. Typically, this ranges from public health announcements about hygiene to quarantining infected individuals.

There are several big questions in this. If there is a cure or palliative, ethically, they should be distributed to those most in need. However, since those most in need are not necessarily those who have the medicine, it would take a large effort to convince the latter to give their supplies to the former rather than saving it for themselves in case they contract the disease. Reducing new infections may also be controversial.

The most effective way of reducing new infections is by quarantining infected people from non-infected people. From an international perspective, this amounts to travel restrictions on countries with significant cases of an infectious disease.

This is of course not very nice for those countries and the people in those countries may try to break those quarantines seeking help from foreign sources.

## Present Status

Currently, there are a few international agreements and organizations helping to prevent the spread of emerging diseases.

The World Health Organization operates the Global Outbreak Alert & Response Network (GOARN). This network of research institutions and hospitals looks for signs of emerging diseases around the world. During the SARS outbreak, Canada's Global Health Intelligence Network, which is part of GOARN, detected signs of a new flu-like disease and alerted the WHO about it. Subsequently, the WHO was able to advise policymakers in Asia and the United States on ways to deal with the threat of SARS. GOARN helps the WHO to identify emerging diseases as early as possible so that the WHO can coordinate a response to new diseases.

Governmental organizations and NGOs also play a major role in identifying and responding to emerging diseases. Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) operates an internal informal network that coordinates disease identification in its focus regions. The US Center for Disease Control and National Institutes of Health are also frequently consulted by other countries for public health advice.

The overarching problem with the international community combating emerging disease epidemics is that there is no centralization and standardization. The WHO is hard pressed to deliver results because it has no enforcement power.

With SARS, it had a very hard time in gaining the cooperation of Chinese authorities in investigating the epidemic. The UNSC can help deal with the situation since it (at least on paper) has more power to enforce resolutions for countries. The UNSC is also nicely placed to deal with the political and security implications of a major epidemic.

### Country Blocs

All the countries on the Security Council are in general agreement that emerging diseases can pose a threat to international security. However, there are differences in how countries prefer to respond to the threat. Countries tend to fall somewhere along a conservative/liberal spectrum where more conservative countries such as China or Pakistan will retain tighter control of their populations whereas more liberal countries such as the US or Germany believe in more lax regulations.

Countries also have different priorities which may cause them to weigh travel sanctions and economic embargoes differently.

The Security Council countries can generally be separated into two coalitions: a conservative group composed of Azerbaijan, China, Morocco, Pakistan, Russia, and South Africa and a liberal group composed of Colombia, France, Germany, Guatemala, India, Portugal, Togo, United Kingdom, and the United States. Compared to the former group, the latter group will be less willing to take drastic action to contain contagious diseases.

### Questions to Consider

The UNSC may be asked to pass unpopular resolutions in order to combat disease outbreaks. In a major epidemic, some important questions that may be considered are the legality of imposing travel and economic sanctions on whole countries. Though countries may have done nothing wrong, quarantines in the form of travel sanctions may be required to keep contagious diseases from spreading to other countries. This should be disturbing on a number of levels since such sanctions in normal times are highly contentious even for the most outcast of countries. The main question for the UNSC will therefore be how far the UNSC can go to save lives at the expense of individual liberties.

### References

List of Emerging and Re-emerging Infectious Diseases

<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/emerging/pages/list.aspx>

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[http://www.who.int/influenza/gisrs\\_laboratory/en/](http://www.who.int/influenza/gisrs_laboratory/en/)

WHO Global Infectious Disease Surveillance Networks

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