

Model United Nations at UCSD presents
On Saturday October 24, 2015

General Assembly – First Committee

Disarmament and International Security



TritonMUN XII

Chaired by Tyler Takemoto

Topic: Asymmetric Warfare

I. Background

The broadest definition of asymmetric warfare is a conflict in which opposing forces differ significantly in military power or strategy. This may refer to a war between two states, in which one state has access to significantly more advanced military might or technology. It may also refer to internal conflicts between states and non-state insurgencies. A narrower definition of the term has gained more traction in recent years, as it is used to describe the rise of terrorism and insurgency on the international stage¹. Overall, asymmetric warfare can be classified into two major categories: asymmetric conflict featuring non-state groups, and power asymmetry between disputing states. Because of its broad scope, the United Nations and international community in general have faced difficulty in addressing the wider phenomenon of asymmetric conflict, instead crafting approaches which focus on specific aspects of the issue.

Despite its current ties to terrorism and radical militant insurgencies, asymmetric warfare is not a new phenomenon. A prominent twentieth century example of asymmetric conflict between states is the proxy warfare that took place in Vietnam and Afghanistan as part of the Cold War. Armed guerrilla forces fortified by the aid of larger states resorted to unconventional tactics in order to oppose a much more powerful military force. At the time, the practice of proxy warfare served as a way for two international hegemony to pursue their conflicting interests without an escalation which would have culminated in nuclear war.

International terrorism, one of the chief security threats facing the international community, is an incarnation of asymmetric warfare². Both international terrorist organizations acting in coordination and so-called “home-grown” terrorists acting alone pose a major

¹Tomes, Robert. “Relearning Counterinsurgency Warfare.” Strategic Studies Institute. 2004.

²Long, David. “Countering Asymmetrical Warfare in the 21st Century.” Center for Contemporary Conflict.

contemporary security threat. Because they lack the conventional military power and organization of a state, terrorists employ tactics that disseminate harm and fear among the general population, often targeting civilians and noncombatants. The defining characteristic of terrorist groups is that they can operate much more fluidly than a state-led coalition, using networks of support and intelligence which flexibly span international borders. Moreover, terrorist organizations may employ tactics of cultural and ideological warfare to radicalize sympathetic individuals on a global scale. It is difficult for state security forces to defend against adaptable and evolving groups, and efforts to bolster counter-terrorism intelligence often cause a backlash against the human rights of domestic citizens, as illustrated by the controversy over intelligence programs which collect mass data on internet and cell phone users worldwide.

Insurgency, another important facet of asymmetric conflict, poses a major obstacle for the international community. An insurgent group is a non-state militant coalition that seeks to oppose or overthrow a state-led force. Current reports on worldwide violence conclude that the vast majority of large-scale ongoing armed conflicts are perpetrated by interstate and intrastate insurgencies³. From a perspective of international security, insurgency is problematic because it hinders the progress of post-conflict stabilization and undermines external efforts to intervene in conflict situations. Two examples of this trend are United States involvement in the Middle East throughout the past decade and recent UN-backed involvement in North Africa. In 2001, United States and NATO forces invaded Afghanistan to eliminate Al Qaeda and remove the Taliban from power. In 2003, a US-led coalition invaded Iraq with the aim of overthrowing the Iraqi regime, which allegedly possessed a stockpiled arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. Both campaigns quickly achieved their topical objectives and installed transitional governments, but long-term

³Backer, David; Huth, Paul; Wilkenfield, Jonathan. "Peace and Conflict 2014." Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland. 2014.

stabilization proved impossible as sectarian violence and insurgent groups led to continued violence against civilians and national forces throughout both countries. Insurgents continue to use tactics ranging from suicide bombings and targeted attacks on noncombatants and military personnel to campaigns of bribery and threats which exploit bureaucratic corruption in strategic areas, rendering efforts to stabilize the region through conventional military force ineffective⁴.

Most importantly, asymmetric conflict has broad effects. When faced with a militarily superior force, combatant groups often resort to unconventional tactics which may include indiscriminate violence, weapons of mass destruction, terror, and insurgency. In the case of interstate conflict, a difference of power between states results in competition and arms proliferation, acting as a regionally destabilizing factor. Even the potential for asymmetric conflict can hinder international cooperation. A key example is the difficulty of nuclear nonproliferation agreements. The perception of a state with much more military power and political influence than its neighbors will promote other states in the region to increase their arsenals in order to safeguard their regional interests⁵. If a regional power holds a nuclear arsenal, negotiating the prevention and scale-back of nuclear programs in the region as a whole becomes much more difficult.

A wide portfolio of current issues can be classified as types or results of asymmetric conflict. Militant extremist groups throughout the Middle East and North Africa such as ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al Shabaab successfully exploit the asymmetric battlefield, employing an arsenal of insurgent tactics and ideological warfare to expand their reach. Interstate disputes in Eurasia such as the conflict in the Balkans, power displays in the South China Sea, and nuclear controversy among Near Eastern nations stem from the failure to peacefully address an

⁴Clarke, Colin; Dunigan, Molly; Paul, Christopher. "Counterinsurgency Scorecard." Rand Corporation. 2013.

⁵Bano, Saira. "Pakistan: Lessons from the India-US Nuclear Deal." The Diplomat. June 22, 2015.

asymmetry of regional power. Addressing these seemingly disparate issues poses a major challenge for the United Nations, but in recognizing the causal link between power asymmetry and destabilization, states have the potential to solve some of the most pressing international security issues of the twenty-first century.

II. United Nations Involvement

The broad definition of asymmetrical conflict renders a unified approach difficult. Despite the lack of a concretely comprehensive initiative, The United Nations has a deep legacy of offsetting international power imbalance on a wide scale as well as spearheading numerous resolutions and task forces to address the more specific issues of unconventional arms proliferation, terrorism and counterinsurgency.

From its inception, the UN has existed not only as a mediator of international conflict, but also a regulatory system to offset power imbalance in the international community. To prevent the occurrence and escalation of conventional and unconventional warfare between international actors, the UN employs tactics of deterrence and intervention. Deterrence refers to strategies that use the threat of punishment to discourage some action. For example, the UN Security Council is authorized to impose sanctions against states under certain circumstances, including when a state unilaterally instigates conflict in violation of the UN Charter. Often, the simple threat of sanctions is enough to discourage nations from engaging in unilateral conflict⁶.

Intervention does not refer exclusively to UN Peacekeeping missions. For example, as a first step in addressing the current insurgent conflict in Yemen, the United Nations intervened diplomatically as a mediator, calling repeatedly for a regulated dialogue between Houthi rebels

⁶Teltsch, Kathleen. "The Early Years." A Global Affair: An Inside Look at the United Nations. Jones and Janello. 1995.

and the Yemeni government⁷. Through facilitated negotiations, the UN may address and deescalate conflict without the controversy and difficulty of mustering “boots on the ground.” Should negotiations fail, the UN provides a multilateral forum to evaluate and legitimize regional responses to conflict, such as the Saudi-led military coalition’s movements against Houthi insurgents in the previous example.

Even before the twenty-first century, the United Nations had been heavily involved in measures to combat international terrorism with numerous conventions, such as the Tokyo Convention of 1963 and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Internationally Protected Persons, Including Diplomatic Agents of 1973. Such conventions adopted by the General Assembly serve to coordinate a mutual punitive stance for certain tactics or facets of terrorism. More recent developments include numerous United Nations Security Council Resolutions, such as Security Council Resolutions 1368 and 1377, which express international commitment to a mutual policy of zero-tolerance for terrorism and terrorist acts.⁸

The United Nations also adopts resolutions on an ad-hoc basis to address specific aspects of pressing issues in terrorism and international security and lay out a unified counterterrorism strategy. For example, Security Council Resolution 1373, adopted in 2001, outlines specific steps that member states must take to combat and prevent terrorism. These steps include the freezing of financial assets linked to terrorist activities and groups, the tightening of border security, the investigation and action against terrorist recruitment, and the refusal of safe haven for individuals

⁷“Houthis condemn UN resolution on Yemen.” Al Jazeera. 2015. Accessed from: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/04/imposes-arms-embargo-yemen-rebels-150414140733146.html>

⁸Cordesman, Anthony. “The Role of the United Nations in Fighting Terrorism.” Center for Strategic and International Studies. 2002. Accessed from: <http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/roleofun.pdf>

affiliated with terrorism⁹. Accompanying the resolution is the establishment of the Counter Terrorism Committee (CTC), a task force that mandates reports from member states to ensure their adherence to the terms set by Resolution 1373.

The United Nations has consistently opposed insurgent conflict because of its role as a destabilizing regional force and the collateral damage it inflicts on civilians and infrastructure. Independent reports, as well as UN-led reports compiled through the UNODC have tied instances of insurgency to specific regional risk factors which the United Nations then attempts to address. Researchers, for example, have posited that insurgency is a political, rather than an ideological phenomenon, and that it can arise from a combination of poverty and poor economic growth, coupled with weak bureaucracy and a rough terrain suitable for guerrilla tactics¹⁰. UNODC reports have reached similar conclusions, further elaborating that insurgent activity occurs with the ultimate cause of economic or political gain, citing the drug-related insurgencies in Latin America and the Middle East¹¹.

Drawing on these insights, the United Nations has recognized the role which effective nation building and economic growth can play in reinforcing regional stability¹². Throughout the period of decolonization and regime change that occurred in the mid-to-late 20th century, the United Nations aimed to provide an auspice under which a stable nation building process could take place. The success of these operations is varied and subject to debate, but the continued

⁹United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373. Accessed from:
[http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/specialmeetings/2012/docs/United%20Nations%20Security%20Council%20Resolution%201373%20\(2001\).pdf](http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/specialmeetings/2012/docs/United%20Nations%20Security%20Council%20Resolution%201373%20(2001).pdf)

¹⁰Fearon, James and Laitin, David. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." Stanford University. 2001. Accessed from:
<http://web.stanford.edu/group/ethnic/workingpapers/apsa011.pdf>

¹¹"Addiction, Crime, and Insurgency: The Transnational Threat of Afghan Opium." UNODC. Accessed from:
http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Afghanistan/Afghan_Opium_Trade_2009_web.pdf

¹²Teltsch, Kathleen. "The Early Years." A Global Affair: An Inside Look at the United Nations. Jones and Janello. 1995.

efforts of the United Nations' measures to foster economic growth and socio-cultural understanding represent an approach that, at its roots, seeks to promote stability.

The United Nations also takes action against specific insurgent conflicts. A notable recent example is the insurgency orchestrated by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (also known as ISIL). In Security Council Resolution 2199, passed earlier this year, the United Nations lays out a comprehensive strategy for combating the methods of funding, recruitment, and expansion of ISIL¹³. The resolution also acknowledges the cultural, political, and economic factors that serve as underlying causes of insurgency.

Overall, the United Nations has served as a check on regional and international power imbalance through its role as an arbitrator and intermediary. It has launched numerous initiatives against facets of asymmetrical conflict in the form of counter-terrorism and counterinsurgency agreements, reports, and task forces. However, relatively little has been done to address the underlying problem of power imbalance that characterizes all asymmetric warfare. This is due in part to the difficulty in identifying and addressing the fundamental power imbalance that may be present in regimes or regions. Nevertheless, the UN has made great progress in promoting stability and responding to asymmetric conflict.

¹³United Nations Security Council Resolution 2199. Accessed from:
[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2199%20\(2015\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2199%20(2015))

III. Bloc Positions

Americas

Following the incidents of September 11, 2001, counter-terrorism and international security have been on the top of the policy agenda for North America. The United States in particular has supported measures to intervene in regions where terrorist groups operate.

Drug related insurgency has developed in tandem with the drug trade in Latin America. The cultivation and trafficking of cocaine and narcotics seem most closely linked to violent crime and insurgent tactics. Colombia and Mexico, two nations affected by the aforementioned issue, have crafted a variety of national, bilateral, and regional initiatives to combat guerrilla groups linked to drug production and trafficking¹⁴.

East Asia and Pacific

In response to a history of terrorist attacks, both Australia and New Zealand have launched extensive initiatives against domestic terrorism which include legislation allowing for a far reaching security apparatus and more international cooperation with foreign intelligence to identify and track potential terrorists¹⁵.

A number of recent cyber-attack incidents on nations in Asia and the West have been traced to computers within China. There is no demonstrated link between the incidents and the government of China. Additionally, a number of alleged cyber-attacks have occurred against the

¹⁴Forero, Juan. "Colombia shares its cartel-fighting expertise with Mexican forces." The Washington Post. 2011. Accessed from: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/21/AR2011012107040.html>

¹⁵"Review of Australia's Counter-Terrorism Machinery." Department of the Prime Minister. Australian Government. Accessed from: https://www.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/190215_CT_Review_0.pdf

Chinese government itself. Cyber-warfare does fall under the definition of asymmetric conflict and its occurrence will likely grow more significant moving into the twenty-first century¹⁶.

Territorial disputes in East Asia, such as the controversy over the South China Sea, also represent a form of asymmetric conflict. Without overt aggression, disputing nations resort to battles of counterintelligence and military demonstrations in the region. Such tensions have the potential to escalate into actual military aggression¹⁷.

Europe

As a consequence of the insurgent conflict in the Middle East and North Africa, almost 140,000 refugees have sought entry into European countries across the Mediterranean Sea. Southern European states like Spain, Italy, and Greece, which are most heavily affected, struggle to keep pace with the sheer volume of asylum seekers¹⁸. Europe also serves as a major financier and provider of fighters for insurgent movements in the Middle East. Insurgent groups like ISIL profit from the sale of cultural artifacts, drugs, and oil, mainly to European buyers. Additionally, social media campaigns launched by groups like ISIL have successfully recruited a steady stream of Europeans to fight for extremist groups. Despite national and international efforts to crack down on both of these phenomena, the exploitation of European markets and media by extremist groups remains a recurring problem¹⁹.

¹⁶Brunnstrom, David and Spetalnick, Daniel. "China in focus as cyber-attack hits millions of U.S. federal workers." Reuters. 2015. Accessed from: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/06/05/us-cybersecurity-usa-idUSKBN00K2IK20150605>

¹⁷] South China Sea Tag. The Diplomat. 2015. Accessed from: <http://thediplomat.com/tag/south-china-sea/>

¹⁸"Mediterranean Crisis 2015 at six months: refugee and migrant numbers highest on record." UNHCR press release. 2015. Accessed from: <http://www.unhcr.org/5592b9b36.html>

¹⁹Stephens, Michael. "Islamic State: Where does jihadist group get its support?" BBC World News. 2014. Accessed from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29004253>

Middle East and Africa

The Middle East and North Africa have taken center stage in recent international dialogue about asymmetric warfare. Radical militant extremist groups such as ISIS in Iraq and Syria, Al-Shabaab in Somalia, and Boko Haram in Nigeria have established robust networks of insurgency throughout the region which threaten to undermine the political and territorial sovereignty of states affected by conflict areas. These extremist groups employ a combination of terrorism, cultural warfare, and ideological campaigns to strengthen their position and extend their reach²⁰.

Recent terrorist attacks in Tunisia, unrest in Egypt and Libya, and ongoing conflict in Afghanistan provide more examples of the continuing instability of the region. The regional conflicts tend to contribute to one another, with insurgents and refugee flows moving within and across state borders, causing violence to “leak” into surrounding areas²¹. Additionally, insurgent groups continue to gain a stronger hold as they exploit economic resources like opiate drugs in Afghanistan, oil, and cultural artifacts looted from historical monuments and museums²².

²⁰“What is ‘Islamic State’?” BBC World News. 2015. Accessed from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29052144>

²¹Salehyan. “Rebels without Borders: Transnational Insurgencies in World Politics.” 2011.

²²“Addiction, Crime, and Insurgency: The Transnational Threat of Afghan Opium.” UNODC. Accessed from: http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Afghanistan/Afghan_Opium_Trade_2009_web.pdf

IV. Current Proposals and Postulates

Regional and international governing bodies such as the UN, EU, Arab League, ASEAN, African Union, USAN, and OAS, among others, help to curb regional power imbalance by providing balanced diplomatic forums to settle disputes and address conflict. Multiple committees and working groups have been established unilaterally and multilaterally, several under the auspices of the UN, with the aim of targeting specific aspects of asymmetric conflict. Examples include the UN Counter-terrorism Committee (CTC) under the Security Council, which enforces the UN's agreements regarding counter-terrorism policy and strategy. The UN Security Council has relied heavily on sanctions in addressing insurgent groups such as the Islamic State. Over the course of several resolutions, the Security Council has imposed targeted sanctions on oil, arms, and cultural artifacts originating from conflict zones tied to insurgencies in the Middle East and North Africa. Coalition Forces fighting against insurgencies have implemented training and supplied arms to domestic fighters opposed to insurgent groups. Such initiatives have been met with mixed success. International Legal infrastructure, such as the International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice seek to deter unconventional conflict by criminalizing atrocities in war and the targeting of innocents.

V. Questions to Consider

1. How can the international community balance counter-terrorism security initiatives with human rights, especially in light of recent controversy over privacy rights and international surveillance programs?
2. Is there any way for the international community to address insurgencies while respecting the territorial sovereignty of states where such insurgencies occur?
3. Is it possible to use an international governing body like the United Nations to mitigate the effects of regional power imbalance between states?
4. How can the international community craft a unified approach in addressing power asymmetry?
5. Are there any ways that existing international and regional efforts can be improved using current knowledge and diplomatic collaboration?
6. How can the Disarmament and International Security, a body within the General Assembly, uniquely contribute to conflict resolution without access to the peacekeeping authority of the Security Council?

VI. Suggested Sites

For general information regarding international affairs and country profiles:

CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

BBC World News Country Profiles: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/country_profiles/default.stm

For more about Asymmetric Warfare:

Rand Corporation (Search relevant keywords): <http://www.rand.org/>

UNODC Counterterrorism Division: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/terrorism/index.html>

UNSC Counterterrorism Committee: <http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/>

Council on Foreign Relations (Search relevant keywords): <http://www.cfr.org/>

For more about the UN and the First Committee (DISEC):

UN Charter: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/>

First Committee Website: <http://www.un.org/en/ga/first/>

UN General Assembly Resolution Database: <http://www.un.org/documents/resga.htm>

UN Security Council Resolution Database: <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/>

United Nations Treaty Collection: <https://treaties.un.org/>

For Model UN tips and guidelines:

Best Delegate: <http://bestdelegate.com/>

VII. Works Cited

“Addiction, Crime, and Insurgency: The Transnational Threat of Afghan Opium.” UNODC.

Accessed from: http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Afghanistan/Afghan_Opium_Trade_2009_web.pdf

Backer, David; Huth, Paul; Wilkenfield, Jonathan. “Peace and Conflict 2014.” Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland. 2014.

Bano, Saira. “Pakistan: Lessons from the India-US Nuclear Deal.” *The Diplomat*. June 22, 2015.

Brunnstrom, David and Spetalnick, Daniel. “China in focus as cyber-attack hits millions of U.S.

federal workers.” Reuters. 2015. Accessed from:

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/06/05/us-cybersecurity-usa-idUSKBN0OK2IK20150605>

Clarke, Colin; Dunigan, Molly; Paul, Christopher. “Counterinsurgency Scorecard.” *Rand Corporation*. 2013.

Cordesman, Anthony. “The Role of the United Nations in Fighting Terrorism.” Center for

Strategic and International Studies. 2002. Accessed from:

<http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/roleofun.pdf>

Fearon, James and Laitin, David. “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War.” Stanford University.

2001. Accessed from: <http://web.stanford.edu/group/ethnic/workingpapers/apsa011.pdf>

Forero, Juan. “Colombia shares its cartel-fighting expertise with Mexican forces.” The

Washington Post. 2011. Accessed from: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/21/AR2011012107040.html)

[dyn/content/article/2011/01/21/AR2011012107040.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/21/AR2011012107040.html)

“Houthis condemn UN resolution on Yemen.” Al Jazeera. 2015. Accessed from:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/04/imposes-arms-embargo-yemen-rebels-150414140733146.html>

Long, David. “Countering Asymmetrical Warfare in the 21st Century.” *Center for Contemporary Conflict*.

“Review of Australia’s Counter-Terrorism Machinery.” Department of the Prime Minister.

Australian Government. Accessed from:

https://www.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/190215_CT_Review_0.pdf

Salehyan. “Rebels without Borders: Transnational Insurgencies in World Politics.” 2011.

South China Sea Tag. The Diplomat. 2015. Accessed from: <http://thediplomat.com/tag/south-china-sea/>

Stephens, Michael. “Islamic State: Where does jihadist group get its support?” BBC World

News. 2014. Accessed from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29004253>

Teltsch, Kathleen. “The Early Years.” *A Global Affair: An Inside Look at the United Nations*.

Jones and Janello. 1995.

Tomes, Robert. “Relearning Counterinsurgency Warfare.” *Strategic Studies Institute*.

2004. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373. Accessed from:

[http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/specialmeetings/2012/docs/United%20Nations%20Security%20Council%20Resolution%201373%20\(2001\).pdf](http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/specialmeetings/2012/docs/United%20Nations%20Security%20Council%20Resolution%201373%20(2001).pdf)

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2199. Accessed from:

[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2199%20\(2015\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2199%20(2015))

“What is ‘Islamic State’?” BBC World News. 2015. Accessed from:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29052144>