

# United Nations General Assembly Background Guide

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Found under the Charter of the United Nations in 1945, the General Assembly is a key organ of the UN, focusing on diverse global issues and striving for cooperative development. As all 193 members of the UN are part of the General Assembly, the body holds important responsibilities for maintaining the safety and welfare of individuals and organizations worldwide. Most notably, the General Assembly controls the UN budget, recommends peaceful settlement for potentially unfriendly relations between nations, and contributes to the consolidation of international laws and standards. For the efficiency of discussion, the Assembly currently oversees six Main Committees that specialize in a range of global issues.<sup>1</sup> However, the power of the General Assembly is not unlimited, with certain authority specifically imparted to other UN organs. For example, the Assembly cannot discuss the same peace and security topics that are discussed in the Security Council at the same time.<sup>2</sup> The General Assembly, with its specific responsibilities and vast possibility of debate, is a crucial organ of the UN to establish effective resolutions for international peace and cooperation.

## I. Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons

### Statement of the Issue:

Nuclear weapons are defined as a device in the form of a bomb or missile causing an explosion through nuclear reaction. A detonation of a nuclear weapon emits several types of energy, including a blast wave, intense light, strong heat, and toxic radiation.<sup>3</sup> The United Nations

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<sup>1</sup> *Role of the General Assembly*. (2010). United Nations Peacekeeping. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/role-of-general-assembly>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations. (2015). *Functions and powers of the General Assembly*. Un.org. <https://www.un.org/en/ga/about/background.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, February 6). *Nuclear Weapon | Chemicals, Radiation and Toxicology Infographics | NCEH*. Wwww.cdc.gov. [https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/multimedia/infographics/nuclear\\_weapon.html](https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/multimedia/infographics/nuclear_weapon.html)

considers nuclear weapons to be the “most dangerous weapons on earth” due to their potential to kill millions of people and cause hazardous effects on the environment. These consequences can also combine to cause a long-lasting catastrophic impact on the targeted location.<sup>4</sup> Nuclear weapons undeniably cause irreparable damage and suffering, and one detonation could mean the cascade of an extremely deadly conflict.

Ever since the introduction of nuclear weapons through the Manhattan Project and the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the 1940s, the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons has been the focus of many international organizations, with the UN General Assembly being at the center.<sup>5</sup> The first resolution adopted by the General Assembly in 1946 formed a Commission tasked with handling the negative consequences of nuclear energy. Ever since then, the General Assembly has worked tirelessly to establish multilateral treaties to reduce nuclear proliferation and testing, including but not limited to, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty signed in 1996, and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons signed in 2017.<sup>6</sup>

The geopolitical tension originating from the 20th Century, as well as the ever-growing nuclear technology stand as great challenges to the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons. Two key nations in this context are the United States and Russia, which have held a careful balance on the regulation of nuclear weapons for more than 30 years after the Cold War.<sup>7</sup> Upon the beginning of the 21st Century, however, more nations have strengthened their advancement in nuclear technology. A notable example is the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, which has successfully completed multiple nuclear tests in the last two decades.<sup>8</sup> Regulation and potential termination of nuclear weapons are no longer applicable to select nuclear countries, as it was in the 20th Century. In today’s world, an effective and holistic development of a resolution regarding nuclear weapons requires a more collective conversation of both nuclear and non-

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<sup>4</sup> *Nuclear Weapons – UNODA*. (n.d.). United Nations. <https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/nuclear/>

<sup>5</sup> *Manhattan Project - Manhattan Project National Historical Park (U.S. National Park Service)*. (2023). Nps.gov. <https://home.nps.gov/mapr/learn/manhattan-project.htm>

<sup>6</sup> *Nuclear Weapons – UNODA*. (n.d.). United Nations. <https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/nuclear/>

<sup>7</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. (2017). *U.S.-Russia Nuclear Arms Control*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-russia-nuclear-arms-control>

<sup>8</sup> *Detecting Nuclear Tests | CTBTO*. (n.d.). Wwww.ctbto.org. <https://www.ctbto.org/our-work/detecting-nuclear-tests>

nuclear states. To do so, diverse perspectives on the cultural, technological, and political aspects of each state must be carefully evaluated.

## **History:**

The use of nuclear weapons was first introduced in August of 1945 when the United States detonated atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>9</sup> A deadly culmination of the government research program widely known as the Manhattan Project, the loss of more than two hundred thousand Japanese citizens led to the surrender of Japan six days after the attack. The Manhattan Project and the subsequent bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was a key transformative event in the 20th century for the use of advanced science and technology in warfare, and the nuclear weapon's deadly potential to single handedly destroy humanity itself.<sup>10</sup> In 1946, the first General Assembly resolution was written to establish a Commission "to deal with the problems raised by the discovery of atomic energy and other related matters".<sup>11</sup> The elimination of nuclear weapons, therefore, has always been a crucial focus for the General Assembly.

The development of nuclear weapons exponentially increased with the Cold War. Lasting from 1947 to 1991, the conflict was centered between the United States and Soviet Union over the control of Eastern Europe and managing the communist influence in Western Europe.<sup>12</sup> In 1949, tensions began to rise with the detonation of an atomic bomb by the Soviet Union at a test range in Kazakhstan. Hydrogen bombs utilizing thermonuclear reactions were soon developed by the United States and later the Soviet Union in the 1950s.<sup>13</sup> Hydrogen bombs were tremendously powerful compared to the previous bombs incorporating a uranium 235 isotope, creating an explosion hundreds of times greater than that of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>14</sup> The development came at a price, however, with both the United States and the Soviet Union creating radioactive

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<sup>9</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. (2017). *U.S.-Russia Nuclear Arms Control*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-russia-nuclear-arms-control>

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Energy. (2019). *Manhattan Project: Japan Surrenders, August 10-15, 1945*. Osti.gov. <https://www.osti.gov/opennet/manhattan-project-history/Events/1945/surrender.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 24 January 1946, [A/RES/1\(I\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. (n.d.). *The Cold War | JFK Library*. Jfklibrary.org. <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/the-cold-war>

<sup>13</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. (2017). *U.S.-Russia Nuclear Arms Control*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-russia-nuclear-arms-control>

<sup>14</sup> *Manhattan Project - Manhattan Project National Historical Park (U.S. National Park Service)*. (2023). Nps.gov. <https://home.nps.gov/mapr/learn/manhattan-project.htm>

fallout in their respective testing sites, endangering the lives of many inhabitants.<sup>15</sup> Around the same time, the United Kingdom also began testing their first nuclear weapon in South Australia.<sup>16</sup> In 1953, United States President Dwight D. Eisenhower delivered a speech to the UN General Assembly, expressing his concern about using nuclear energy as a form of destruction and encouraging international collaboration for the peace and safety of mankind.<sup>17</sup> President Eisenhower's speech sparked the creation of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), an organization dedicated to international collaboration on civilian nuclear research.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately, tensions continued to rise in the early 1960s, especially fueled by the Cuban Missile Crisis. By this point, France and China had also been successful at the detonation of atomic bombs.<sup>19</sup> After frequent talks of negotiations during the same time, the United States, the Soviet Union, as well as the United Kingdom, signed the Limited Test Ban Treaty in 1963, which banned the detonation of nuclear weapons in the “atmosphere, outer space, and under water, and to significantly restrict underground testing”.<sup>20</sup> In 1968, the nuclear states including the three aforementioned countries alongside non-nuclear states signed the Treaty of the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), a landmark event in the Cold War arms race. From this treaty, the nuclear states agreed to terminate the transfer of nuclear weapons across other states, and the non-nuclear states agreed to not develop, test, nor receive nuclear weapons.<sup>21</sup> As of now, 190 countries have signed the NPT, with only India, Israel, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Pakistan, and South Sudan outside the treaty.<sup>22</sup> In addition, the General Assembly is responsible for a review of the Treaty every five years. Notably in 2010, the states

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<sup>15</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. (2017). *U.S.-Russia Nuclear Arms Control*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-russia-nuclear-arms-control>

<sup>16</sup> ICAN. (2010). *History of Nuclear Weapons*. ICAN. [https://www.icanw.org/nuclear\\_weapons\\_history](https://www.icanw.org/nuclear_weapons_history)

<sup>17</sup> National Archives. (n.d.). *Atoms for Peace | Eisenhower Presidential Library*. [www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov](http://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov). <https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/research/online-documents/atoms-peace>

<sup>18</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. (2017). *U.S.-Russia Nuclear Arms Control*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-russia-nuclear-arms-control>

<sup>19</sup> ICAN. (2010). *History of Nuclear Weapons*. ICAN. [https://www.icanw.org/nuclear\\_weapons\\_history](https://www.icanw.org/nuclear_weapons_history)

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> *Milestones: 1961–1968 - Office of the Historian*. (n.d.). [History.state.gov](https://history.state.gov). <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/npt#:~:text=The%20Nuclear%20Non%2DProliferation%20Treaty%20was%20an%20agreement%20signed%20in>

<sup>22</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. (2017). *U.S.-Russia Nuclear Arms Control*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-russia-nuclear-arms-control>

came to a consensus on “conclusions and recommendations for follow-on actions” for the Treaty. A Review Conference in 2026 is currently under preparation.<sup>23</sup>

In 1989, the collapse of the Berlin Wall signified the end of Communist rule in Eastern Europe. With the imminent fall of the Soviet Union by the Summer of 1991, United States President George H.W. Bush and Soviet Union President Gorbachev signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which focused on decreasing the number of nuclear weapons in both countries.<sup>24</sup> Later that year, the Soviet Union was dissolved into multiple nations, marking the end of the Cold War. While the dissolution brought doubts on START, each republic agreed to either destroy the weapons or transfer them to Russia. A START II agreement was later ratified in 1996, further limiting the number of nuclear weapons in the United States and the former Soviet republics.<sup>25</sup> However, international complications led to START II never being carried out. In 2010, the New START treaty was signed by United States President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, proposing additional reduction of nuclear weapons, with a 30% cut on deployed warheads and even “lower caps on deployed and non-deployed intercontinental ballistic missile launchers, submarine-launched ballistic missile launchers, and heavy bombers equipped for nuclear weapons”.<sup>26</sup>

The Russo-Ukrainian War, which began in 2014 but recently escalated in 2022, has increased tension on the use of nuclear weapons in Russia, the United States, and other nuclear countries. Russia holds the potential to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine, especially if they receive threats from Ukraine. As the United States is supplying Ukraine with military aid, the current relationship between the United States and Russia appears to be unpredictable.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the success of Democratic People’s Republic of Korea on the conduction of nuclear tests in

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<sup>23</sup> United Nations. (n.d.). *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) – UNODA*. United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. <https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/nuclear/npt/>

<sup>24</sup> Office of the Historian. (2019). *The Collapse of the Soviet Union*. State.gov; Office of the Historian. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992/collapse-soviet-union>

<sup>25</sup> *Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties, 1991 and 1993*. (2020). State.gov. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/pcw/104210.htm>

<sup>26</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. (2017). *U.S.-Russia Nuclear Arms Control*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-russia-nuclear-arms-control>

<sup>27</sup> Williams, H. (2022, October 14). *Deterring Nuclear Weapons Use in Ukraine*. Www.csis.org. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/deterring-nuclear-weapons-use-ukraine>

2006, and most recently in 2019, signifies that reducing nuclear weapons is currently a much greater global issue, expanding vastly outside of the Western Hemisphere.<sup>28 29</sup>

### **Analysis:**

The nonproliferation of nuclear weapons has been at the heart of the United Nations General Assembly since its establishment. After a number of bilateral and plurilateral treaties for the elimination of nuclear weapons, there still exists a multitude of challenges for complete eradication worldwide. The capability of nuclear weapons to destroy a nation's infrastructure, and cause thousands, if not millions of mortalities can be seen as representation of a country's offensive and defensive capabilities. A mutual reduction is thus incredibly challenging, as the natural limitation of a country's transparency on nuclear weapons casts an immediate uncertainty on the other country's confidence to reduce their weapons.

Nonetheless, the movement for the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons continues to prevail. In the 2018 *Securing Our Common Future: Agenda for Disarmament*, UN Secretary-General António Guterres emphasizes the need for nonproliferation and total elimination of nuclear weapons. Secretary-General Guterres highlighted that "the current nuclear risks we face are unacceptable, and they are growing. They are exacerbated by the recent tendency of major powers to turn away from disarmament and arms control as a means for reducing international tensions and improving the security environment".<sup>30</sup> In relation to the agenda, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) via the General Assembly was adopted in 2017 and entered into force in 2021. TPNW includes a comprehensive list of prohibitions on any involvement with nuclear weapon activities, including their development, acquisition, and possession. The Treaty also obliges states to provide support for individuals impacted by the use or testing of nuclear weapons.<sup>31</sup> It is clear to see that there continues to be significant action by

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<sup>28</sup> ICAN. (2010). *History of Nuclear Weapons*. ICAN. [https://www.icanw.org/nuclear\\_weapons\\_history](https://www.icanw.org/nuclear_weapons_history)

<sup>29</sup> *Detecting Nuclear Tests | CTBTO*. (n.d.). Wwww.ctbto.org. <https://www.ctbto.org/our-work/detecting-nuclear-tests>

<sup>30</sup> *SECURING OUR COMMON FUTURE An Agenda for Disarmament*. (2018). <https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/sg-disarmament-agenda-pubs-page.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> *Nuclear Weapons – UNODA*. (n.d.). United Nations. <https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/nuclear/>

the United Nations to promote nonproliferation of nuclear weapons and that nations are open to cooperation.

The continuous discussions between nuclear states, as well as taking account of the perspectives of non-nuclear states will be essential for an effective termination of nuclear weapons. Such results have been exemplified through the number of meetings between representatives of nuclear states, mainly the United States and the Soviet Union, throughout the Cold War.<sup>32</sup> While the immediate outcome of the meetings may not have been largely substantial, many contributed to the ultimate fruition of disarmament treaties. In today's world, the use of nuclear weapons is no longer limited to the few involved in the 20th Century. With the armed conflict in the Middle East, the Russo-Ukrainian War, and the continuous tension across the Korean Peninsula, it is imperative that the conversation on the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons involve a much more diverse representation across both nuclear and non-nuclear states.<sup>33</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

The nonproliferation of nuclear weapons is a pertinent and alarming global issue as the weapons hold the potential to jeopardize the lives of millions and irreversibly destroy a country's infrastructure. The General Assembly, alongside the representatives of nuclear and non-nuclear states, has historically developed multilateral resolutions to mitigate the effects of nuclear weapons and ultimately terminate their usage across the world.<sup>34</sup> While substantial progress has been made, the complete eradication of nuclear weapons is challenged by geopolitical tensions across nations and the exponential development of nuclear technology in the 21st Century. A greater global collaboration for the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons will be the key to protecting the peace and security of both nuclear and non-nuclear states.

### **Questions:**

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<sup>32</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. (2017). *U.S.-Russia Nuclear Arms Control*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-russia-nuclear-arms-control>

<sup>33</sup> *SECURING OUR COMMON FUTURE An Agenda for Disarmament*. (2018). <https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/sg-disarmament-agenda-pubs-page.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> *Nuclear Weapons – UNODA*. (n.d.). United Nations. <https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/nuclear/>

1. Can the use of nuclear weapons ever be truly eliminated? If so, what specific steps should be implemented to eventually reach that end goal?
2. The discussion on the development and regulation of nuclear weapons often involves a few specific nuclear states. What measures should be taken to create a more inclusive environment for all nations to collaborate on nonproliferation?
3. What are some risks associated with nuclear weapons, in the context of environment, health, and politics? Should nations be responsible for the potential negative impacts, and how can those impacts be mitigated?
4. How can nuclear weapons be properly disposed of without causing harm to the environment? Who should be responsible for ensuring the integrity of such a process?

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www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov. <https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/research/online-documents/atoms-peace>

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## II. Reframing Humanitarian Intervention in Current and Future Global Conflicts

### Statement of the Issue:

The principle of humanitarian intervention is simple: does the international community have the responsibility to protect (abbreviated as R2P) the world's citizens from grave human rights abuses? And, if so, by what means? These are questions that the General Assembly committee must look to address.

### History:

To begin, it is important to consider the potential start dates of when humanitarian intervention became a concept in international law. While many can point to examples in the 19th century, our discussion will focus on the most modern interpretation of humanitarian intervention in international law, coming largely from the 1990s.

Prior to the 1990s, many nations had exceeded what would be considered today as humanitarian intervention. Examples include Indian involvement with Bangladeshi independence, Viet Nam's involvement with the ousting of Khmer Rouge, and Tanzania's invasion to oust the Ugandan leader Idi Amin. All of these had a humanitarian veil to them, but also were accompanied by political goals, and without the formal consent of the international community.<sup>35</sup>

The notion of modern humanitarian intervention came about with the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. With this, modern humanitarian intervention is defined from events following the breakup of Yugoslavia. During the breakup of the Yugoslav federation, the UN Peacekeeping operation was unequipped to handle the scale of destruction committed by Serbian forces. In one partially horrific example, a small group UN peacekeeping troops were responsible for guarding the Srebrenica refugee camp, but the small peacekeeping force was unable to hold off the Serbian advances. What followed was one of the worst mass genocides in

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<sup>35</sup> Bell, Duncan. 'Humanitarian Intervention'. In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Chicago, IL: Encyclopædia Britannica, 14 December 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/humanitarian-intervention>.

history, and many said that the cause for this came from the international community's inability to make a rapid response or take strong preventative action.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, during the Rwandan genocide a small, poorly equipped force of a few hundred peacekeepers, had the responsibility to mitigate systematic genocide across the entire country.<sup>37</sup> Both missions ended in spectacular failures. As a result, many of those in the international community were trying to find a different way forward.

What we consider “modern” humanitarian intervention was influenced by events in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. This all revolved around the violence in Kosovo and, in this case, diplomatic negotiations broke down, causing North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces to intervene. Their rationale rested on the mandate of preventing further human rights abuses. The question of whether or not this outside intervention was justified has been largely debated across the world.<sup>38</sup>

From the 20th century, then Secretary-General Kofi Annan kept on challenging the UN General Assembly to codify principles to prevent genocide.<sup>39</sup> As a result, the Canadian government set up the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, a group filled with mostly academics and other policy experts. This produced the “Responsibility to Protect” or R2P, which had four main principles:

1. An affirmation of the idea of sovereignty as [a] responsibility;
2. An assertion of the threefold responsibility of the international community of states – to prevent, to react and, to rebuild – when faced with human protection claims in states that are either unable or unwilling to discharge their responsibility to protect;

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<sup>36</sup> ‘The Fall of Srebrenica and the Failure of UN Peacekeeping’. *Human Rights Watch*, 15 October 1995. <https://www.hrw.org/report/1995/10/15/fall-srebrenica-and-failure-un-peacekeeping/bosnia-and-herzegovina>.

<sup>37</sup> Council of Councils. ‘The Challenge of Humanitarian Intervention Since Rwanda’. Accessed 22 December 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/councilofcouncils/global-memos/challenge-humanitarian-intervention-rwanda>.

<sup>38</sup> Morris, Nicholas. ‘Humanitarian Intervention in the Balkans’. In *Humanitarian Intervention and International Relations*, edited by Jennifer M. Welsh, O. Oxford University Press, 2003. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199267219.003.0006>.

<sup>39</sup> ‘United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect’. Accessed 9 December 2023. <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/about-responsibility-to-protect.shtml>.

3. A definition of the threshold (large scale loss of life or ethnic cleansing, actual or apprehended) that human protection claims must meet if they are to justify military intervention; and
4. An articulation of the precautionary principles (right intention, last resort, proportional means, and reasonable prospects) that must be observed when military force is used for human protection purposes.<sup>40</sup>

In 2005, the General Assembly declared that “The international community, through the United Nations (UN), also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means, in accordance with Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter, to help to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity”. This was, specifically, stating that each country has the responsibility to address human rights abuses.<sup>41</sup>

One of the first cases to exercise the R2P doctrine was in 2011 in Libya. The Arab Spring protest swept through the North African country against its long-time ruler, Muammar Quadaffi. Yet, the protesters were treated in incredibly brutal ways, including the government calling them “cockroaches” and promising destructive urban warfare.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the UN Security Council authorized NATO to implement a no-fly zone, and take necessary actions “to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack” should a ceasefire between rebel groups and the central government not be restored.<sup>43</sup> One of the main proponents behind this humanitarian intervention was the United States. Yet, the then-President Barack Obama had a reluctance to involve the United States. As a result, humanitarian intervention, with the explicit purpose of alleviating populations suffering through military forces, was not used by the international community for Libyan civilians. This event had many questioning the legitimacy of the

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<sup>40</sup> International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, Gareth J. Evans, Mohamed Sahnoun, and International Development Research Centre (Canada), eds. *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty*. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001.

<sup>41</sup> United Nations General Assembly. 2005 World Summit Outcome, A/RES/60/1 (2005). <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/487/60/PDF/N0548760.pdf?OpenElement>.

<sup>42</sup> Hamid, Shadi. ‘Everyone Says the Libya Intervention Was a Failure. They’re Wrong.’ Brookings, 12 April 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/everyone-says-the-libya-intervention-was-a-failure-theyre-wrong/>.

<sup>43</sup> United Nations Security Council. Resolution 1973 (2011), S/RES/1973. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/268/39/PDF/N1126839.pdf?OpenElement>.

Responsibility to Protect doctrine. Further, many countries see R2P now an instrument of regime change, making it further unattractive on the global stage.

### **Analysis:**

One of the major obstacles to dealing with the Responsibility to Protection is the idea of sovereignty. In the Westphalian tradition, it corresponds to the idea that a nation has absolute control and authority within its own borders. The R2P doctrine attempts to rectify this contradiction by using it as an example as to why the first responsibility is on the state, but this has not stopped many opponents of R2P from claiming it is a gross violation of state sovereignty. In an ever-polarized world, many national doctrines rest on the policy of non-intervention, meaning that R2P is incompatible with the way many countries perceive themselves to function.

This also brings forth a major question: who has the authority to authorize these types of intervention? According to the UN Charter, this power must be expressly stated by the UN Security Council. However, with the permanent five members easily able to block a resolution with their veto power, this type of intervention is rarely ever authorized. In the wave of humanitarian disaster caused by the Syrian Civil War, for example, operations conducted under the guise of stopping human suffering were not authorized by the UNSC, but instead by individual countries. Such as in 2018, when France, the United Kingdom, and the United States all struck targets in Syria after the Syrian government used chemical weapons when fighting the civil war. Looking at the discourse used by these three nations, what was keenly empathized was that their strike existed to send a simple message to the Syrian government to not commit such a grave breach of human rights abuses.<sup>44</sup> The effectiveness of this strike and its message is hotly debated.

Another part of humanitarian intervention is the idea of proportionality: that the presence of the international community in humanitarian intervention must be proportional to the human rights abuses, and the relative power that the perpetrating party wields. However, this is often judged in hindsight, with no clear direct path towards future application. Furthermore, while the principle

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<sup>44</sup> Jim Garamone. 'Pentagon Officials Describe Syria Strikes, Hope Assad Gets Message'. Joint Chiefs of Staff. Accessed 10 December 2023. <https://www.jcs.mil/Media/News/News-Display/Article/1493784/pentagon-officials-describe-syria-strikes-hope-assad-gets-message/>.

may be clearer for military action, the question of how this translates to other measures remains more difficult to determine. For example, economic measures (sanctions) are a highly contested debate, where their impacts can be seen more on the civilians whom, in theory, humanitarian intervention seeks to protect.<sup>45</sup>

Lastly, there comes the question of how this principle reacts to non-state actors, who are operating within the borders of another member state. A recent example of this conundrum is dealing with Operation Inherent Resolve, a United States backed effort to remove the Islamic State (ISIL). To do so, the United States and its allies conducted combat operations and air strikes in countries such as Syria, where they did not have the explicit permission of the Syrian government to conduct those missions. However, because the target was not the Syrian state, or necessarily Syrian citizens, and instead a third-party actors, there has arisen a larger discussion of sovereignty, the R2P, and who has the authority to decide when intervention is necessary.<sup>46</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

In all, modern humanitarian intervention, while it is a concept that has been around for many years, has relatively recent developments. The discussion around it has again shifted and become more complex in recent years with the rise of non-state actors and U.S. intervention in the Middle East with the “War on Terrorism”. The ever-changing dynamics of warfare and peacekeeping missions bring about questions of proportionality, non-state actors, and authorization.

### **Resources to Use:**

When researching through this project, delegates are highly recommended to use past precedence in language. Reading the original copy of the resolutions discussed in this paper, and finding one or two unique to one’s assigned nation, is highly encouraged as the precision of language is vital. Using the language of the past, and understanding the effectiveness of the current limits, paves the way for a more useful conversation in the future.

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<sup>45</sup> Michael E. O’Hanlon. ‘Doing It Right: The Future of Humanitarian Intervention’. Brookings, 1 September 2000. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/doing-it-right-the-future-of-humanitarian-intervention/>.

<sup>46</sup> Sean W. O’Donnell, Diana Shaw, and Nicole L. Angarella. ‘Operation Inherent Resolve’. Accessed 10 December 2023. [https://media.defense.gov/2022/Nov/01/2003106275/-1/-1/1/OIR\\_Q4\\_SEP22\\_GOLD\\_508.PDF](https://media.defense.gov/2022/Nov/01/2003106275/-1/-1/1/OIR_Q4_SEP22_GOLD_508.PDF).

## Questions:

1. What does modern humanitarian intervention mean to your country? Are they adherent supporters or opponents of the idea?
2. Who should authorize humanitarian intervention? How does this interact with the Charter of the United Nations?
3. How is the concept of proportionality related to R2P and your country's position?
4. How does humanitarian intervention relate to current conflicts seen today? And how does it relate to your country and their relation to the conflict?

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