

YMCA MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

Topic Descriptions

Committee: Historical Security Council

Chair: Eric Han

Time Period: 1980s

Topic #1: War in the Middle East - Iran-Iraq War, Lebanon War

Introduction & Historical Background

The Middle East is a geopolitical region bounded to the West by Egypt, Iran in the East, the Arabian Peninsula in the South, and Türkiye in the North. This is an extremely diverse region and, as a result, territorial and religious conflict is common. The Middle East also has major reserves of oil, making it a very important region in the global economy.

With the collapse of the Ottoman empire after the First World War, the victorious nations, Britain and France, carved up the region through a series of treaties starting with the Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916. These treaties were known as the **Mandate System**. Following Britain and France's imperialist goals, the Middle East was ultimately split up so that historically conflicting religious groups were put together and other groups were divided. Adding onto the tensions was the controversial creation of **Israel** in 1948, which was located on land claimed to historically belong to Palestinian Arabs. With the start of the **Cold War** in the second half of the 20th century, both the United States and Soviet Russia were fighting for control over the vast resources (mainly oil) in the Middle East region. This has led to a drastic increase of US and USSR political, economic, and military influence in the region.

Current Status

In September 1980, Iraqi forces launched a full scale invasion on neighboring Iran. Tensions between Iraq and Iran go back to almost immediately after the establishment of Iraq in 1921. A major cause of these tensions was a conflict over territorial claims, especially the **Shatt al-Arab waterway**. Following a successful Iranian counteroffensive that pushed borders back to pre-war lines in 1982, a longstanding **stalemate** has been created.

Following the attempted assassination of Israel's ambassador to Britain by the **Palestine Liberation Organization**, who have a major presence in Lebanon, Israeli troops invaded Lebanon in June of 1982. This has exacerbated an **ongoing civil war** in Lebanon between the Christian **Phalangists** and the Muslim **Lebanese National Movement**. **Syria** also recently joined in 1983 to help Lebanon and prevent its defeat, worsening the conflict.

Themes to Consider

The root causes of these conflicts are a culmination of **decades of cultural and territorial tensions** that can be traced back to the Mandate system. For example, long standing religious tensions between the Sunni and Shia Muslims, conflicts between Muslims and Christians in Lebanon, and territorial conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians.

Taking into consideration the Middle East's global importance as a **major oil exporter**, these conflicts have a lot of **third-party influence** from global superpowers. The Cold War has only increased third party influence as the US and the USSR attempt to gain more political and economic allies. Their presence has only served to exacerbate these conflicts, and their motives are usually exploitative, sometimes leading to even more conflict.

These conflicts have a **drastic humanitarian impact**. Millions are displaced and humanitarian violations often occur. An example of this would be the **massacres at Sabra and Shatila**, and the numerous hostage crises in the Lebanon war. These problems are only worsened by the general poverty and instability within the region.

Discussion Questions

1. How can the United Nations create an agreeable and speedy end to ongoing conflicts and instability in the Middle East?
2. What role should the United Nations play in cultivating cooperation between countries in the region and ending long-standing tensions?
3. How can the United Nations protect the autonomy of nations in the region and prevent 3rd party influence?

Resources

1. "Global Connections: The Middle East." *PBS*, www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/themes/culture/. Accessed 19 May 2024.

(Highly Recommend) Description: A basic overview of the Middle East region.

2. Hiltermann, Joost. "The Middle East in Chaos: Of Orders and Borders." *International Crisis Group*, 25 May 2018, www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/middle-east-chaos-orders-and-borders. Accessed 19 May 2024.

(Highly Recommend) Description: In-depth explanation over the history behind tensions, and an explanation of various conflicts.

3. "Iran-Iraq War - Summary, Timeline and Legacy." *History*, A&E Television Networks, 13 July 2021, www.history.com/topics/middle-east/iran-iraq-war. Accessed 19 May 2024.

Description: Summary of the Iran-Iraq War, including its causes.

4. Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Iran-Iraq War." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 18 Apr. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Iran-Iraq-War>. Accessed 19 May 2024.

Description: A more in-depth explanation of the course of the Iran-Iraq War.

5. "The Lebanon War 1982." *Anti-Defamation League*, 1 Sept. 2016, www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/lebanon-war-1982. Accessed 19 May 2024.

Description: Summary of the 1982 Lebanon War.

6. Kingston, Paul and Ochsenwald, William L.. "Lebanese Civil War." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 17 May. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Lebanese-Civil-War>. Accessed 19 May 2024.

Description: Summary of the Lebanese Civil War, important context for the 1982 Lebanon War.

Topic #2: Rise of International Drug Trafficking

Introduction and Historical Background

The **market for illicit substances** throughout the 1970s and 80s is rapidly expanding, increasing in profits and also violence. The most prominent drugs are **cocaine, marijuana, and opiates**. With a rise in conflicts and instability in regions such as **Latin America** and the **Middle East**, they quickly became prominent regions for the production and sale of drugs.

Drug trafficking is certainly not a new phenomenon, but due to a **massive increase in demand** for illicit substances in countries such as the US in the 1960s (drug use is a major component of many growing counterculture movements: ex. Hippies), it became an extremely profitable venture that many sought to capitalize on. Organized drug trafficking operations have sprung up or have greatly expanded in **Latin America** and the **Middle East**, especially countries like Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Nicaragua, Panama, Lebanon, and Syria. Much of this can be attributed to the relatively weak governments in place at the time due to mass instability in their respective regions; instability that is **caused mainly by the Cold War**.

Current Status

After US President Nixon declared a **“War on Drugs”** in 1971, an exorbitant amount of money (over 95 million dollars annually in the US in 1984) has been funneled into fighting drug traffickers and cartels in Latin America. Cartels are fighting the government and each other, destabilizing the entire region and making it very dangerous. The influence and money that these groups have are also starting to allow them to **corrupt the government**. For example, the Medellin Cartel in Colombia frequently bribe or kill officials to gain influence.

The **Bekaa valley** in Lebanon has historically been a region of **cannabis** production, however, due to the governmental instability caused by the **Lebanese civil war**, production has been able to surge. **Syria** and groups like **Hezbollah** were able to capitalize off the instability and grow their operations. In Syria, the export of illegal drugs has eclipsed Syria's legal exports, and the power and wealth of the illegal drug trade has penetrated almost every aspect of Syria, causing Syria to be labeled a **Narco-state** by the US.

Themes to Consider

The presence of cartels and drug trafficking organizations not only creates violence and instability, but **it also prolongs violence**. In **Colombia**, a civil war has raged on since 1964, and it has only been dragged on due to the involvement of drug trafficking organizations from both Colombia and Mexico. **Drug money** is also being used to fund wars, prolonging them and destabilizing the region at large.

Many Drug-traffickers try to maintain good relationships with citizens to grow their regional influence. Cartels in Latin America and the Middle East offer **low-income farmers** lots of money to start growing products for them, providing them with a **stable flow of income**. Cartels also funnel money into the communities that they operate in, and are sometimes seen as providers of **“protection”** from other cartels.

The core of this issue is the **humanitarian crisis** that it creates. Homicides, kidnappings, and displacements are on the rise. Politicians are murdered and many governments are corrupted. This violence is also referred to as **Narco-terrorism**.

Discussion Questions

1. What can the United Nations do to end drug related violence in the Middle East and Latin America?
2. How can the United Nations create an efficient solution and curb the growth of drug trafficking operations around the world?
3. What can the United Nations do to curb the influence of traffickers and cartels in communities and governments?

Resources

1. "History of Drug Trafficking - Colombia, U.S. & Mexico." *History*, A&E Television Networks, 10 June 2019, www.history.com/topics/crime/history-of-drug-trafficking. Accessed 19 May 2024.

(Highly Recommend) Description: A history of modern day drug-trafficking from the perspective of America, a major market of illicit substances.

2. Smith, David. "Overview of the Latin American Drug Trade, 1970s-Present." *Recent Central American History*, UVM, 11 Apr. 2019, blog.uvm.edu/sosten-centralamerica/2019/04/11/overview-of-the-drug-trade-1970s-present/. Accessed 19 May 2024.

(Highly Recommend) Description: An in-depth history of drug trafficking in Latin America.

3. Britto, Lina. "The Drug Wars in Colombia." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History*, Oxford UP, 28 Sept. 2020, oxfordre.com/latinamericanhistory/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.001.0001/acrefore-9780199366439-e-504. Accessed 19 May 2024.

Description: A very in-depth history of the drug wars in Colombia.

4. Cwerman, Ralph. "Lebanon's Valley of Drugs." *The Washington Post*, 18 Nov. 1990, www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1990/11/18/lebanons-valley-of-drugs/9cca8a22-5a60-4529-9d5c-cfedf083af4f/. Accessed 19 May 2024.

Description: An article about drug trafficking in Lebanon, especially in the Bekaa valley.

5. Levanoni, Moran. "No Boundaries – the Syrian-Lebanese Drug Economy." *Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies*, Tel-Aviv University, 22 Dec. 2021, dayan.org/content/no-boundaries-syrian-lebanese-drug-economy. Accessed 19 May 2024.

Description: An in-depth article detailing the history of the drug economy in Syria and Lebanon, with emphasis placed on the Bekaa valley.

6. Blum, William. "The CIA, Contras, Gangs, and Crack." *Institute for Policy Studies*, 1 Nov. 1996, ips-dc.org/the_cia_contras_gangs_and_crack/. Accessed 19 May 2024.
Description: An article detailing a controversy that connected the CIA with a crack selling operation involving the Contras.

Topic #3: Central American Crisis (Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras)

Introduction and Historical Background

The **Central American Crisis** began in the late 1970s. It is a period of mass instability near the end of the Cold War that is characterized by many civil wars and leftist revolutions. The countries most associated with this instability are Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. It is also a period of intense American intervention.

Throughout the 1900s, the US maintained influence throughout Central America through a combination of economic leverage, investments, and pro-American autocratic rulers. These practices were **very exploitative of the labor and peasant classes**, leading to calls for reform and ultimately, revolution. During the **Cold War**, the US feared that democratic and leftist revolutions in Central America would **invite Communist interference** into the Western hemisphere. **The US would intervene frequently** by backing whichever group would prevent Communist influence, whether it be the standing governments or rebel groups. This has created an extremely chaotic and violent environment in Central America.

Current Status

In 1954, a **CIA-backed coup** in Guatemala led to a civil war between rebel groups and the government that is still raging on. In 1979, following the **overthrow of the American-backed Somoza dictatorship** by the **Sandinista** rebel group in Nicaragua, a new civil war started with the rise of the US-backed **Contra rebel group**. The successful Sandinista revolution sparked revolts in nearby countries, while also leading to more government crackdowns. In 1979, the ousting of **Salvadoran military dictator Carlos Romero** ultimately led to a civil war between the American-backed government and the **Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN)** rebel group starting in 1981. Honduras, a country long-dominated economically and politically by American corporations, has been turned into a **staging ground for covert operations** for the US and a front in the Contra War.

Themes to Consider

Displacement of millions and human rights violations such as torture, murder, and forced disappearances are a very prevalent issue. For example, **Battalion 3-16** in Honduras, the **Panzós Massacre** in Guatemala, and the many violations carried out by the Contras.

Many of these conflicts have either been exacerbated or directly created by **foreign intervention and meddling**. For example, the US has played a key role in creating and prolonging conflicts by providing military training, money, advanced weaponry, and technology to pro-US groups such as the Contras and the Salvadoran government. The Soviets during this period of instability have also provided substantial economic and military support to anti-US leftist groups such as the Sandinistas and FMLN.

Many of these conflicts can also be linked back to a very **oppressive political climate**, unfair **economic practices**, and a general **lack of democratic and general reforms**. For example, crackdowns by the Sandinistas on political opponents directly led to the rise of the Contras, and the FMLN rose to prominence in El Salvador because of a perceived lack of substantial reform and democracy after the government in Guatemala (put in place by the US) rolled back land reforms that benefited small farmers.

Discussion Questions

1. How can the United Nations create an immediate end to the conflicts in the Central America region?
2. What should the United Nations do to help promote reform that could prevent future calls for revolution?
3. What role should the United Nations play in preventing and policing foreign countries from intervening in the Central America region?

Resources

1. Williams, Virginia S., et al. "Central America Wars, 1980s." *United States Foreign Policy History and Resource Guide*, Jan. 2022, peacehistory-usfp.org/central-america-wars/. Accessed 19 May 2024.

(Highly Recommend) Description: An in-depth article explaining the causes of the Central American Crisis, going in-depth on each country.

2. "Timeline: Guatemala's Brutal Civil War." *PBS*, 7 Mar. 2011, www.pbs.org/newshour/health/latin_america-jan-june11-timeline_03-07. Accessed 19 May 2024.

Description: Timeline of the conflict in Guatemala.

3. "Nicaraguan Revolution (1978-1990)." *American Archive of Public Broadcasting*, americanarchive.org/exhibits/newshour-cold-war/nicaragua. Accessed 19 May 2024.

Description: A history of the Nicaraguan revolution and civil war.

4. "Soviet-Latin American Relations." *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture*, Encyclopedia.com, 15 May 2024, www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/soviet-latin-american-relations. Accessed 19 May 2024.

Description: An article about the history of connections between Latin America and the Soviet Union.

5. Flemion, Philip F. "Civil War." *El Salvador*, Britannica, www.britannica.com/place/El-Salvador/Civil-war. Accessed 19 May 2024.

Description: A history of the civil war in El-Salvador.

6. "Honduras." *Where We Work*, The Center for Justice and Accountability, cja.org/where-we-work/honduras/. Accessed 19 May 2024.

Description: An explanation of the humanitarian crises in Honduras.