



NHSMUN

SPECPOL

UPDATE PAPER

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Terry Wang

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Nastasja Vásquez
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Natalia Carrillo

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Adiva Ara Khan
Anshul Magal
Analucia Tello
Sofia Velasco
Renata Venzor

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL)! My name is Fabiana Gil, and I am thrilled to be one of your Assistant Directors for session I of NHSMUN 2025. This is my first year on staff, but I attended NHSMUN as a delegate in 2023 at UNHRC. I cannot wait to meet you all and be part of a learning and educational experience for both of us! Throughout high school, I participated in Model UN conferences by being Dais, which has helped me build critical thinking abilities and work with people with different points of view.

I am a first-year law student at Universidad Catolica Andres Bello (UCAB) living in Caracas, Venezuela. As you can tell by my major and my involvement in Model UN, I am deeply interested in working to live in a just world and coming up with creative solutions to whichever problem I face. Outside of school, I like to do occasional hikes, run, go to the beach, go out with my friends, and try out new sports. Currently, the sport I am enjoying the most is paddle. Being a delegate at NHSMUN is an extremely exciting and surreal experience, but it is completely normal to be nervous. Just remember that all delegates attend to try new things and to engage in interesting discussions!

My fellow assistant directors and I wrote this Update Paper thinking about you! This Update Paper has extremely relevant and important information regarding both topics so you can be better prepared during the conference. However, remember to do research of your own to keep yourselves up to date with these topics, which change regularly.

I wish you all a very successful conference!

Sincerely,

Fabiana Gil

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Special Political and Decolonization Committee Assistant Director

Session I



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Dear Delegates,

My name is Marta Mateu, and I am delighted to welcome all of you to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL), where I will be one of your Assistant Directors for session I of NHSMUN 2025, a conference that I attended as a delegate in the committee DISEC back in 2023 and that I've been completely mesmerized by since. I was actively involved in Model UN through high school in Europe and America, where I attended several conferences as both a Dais and a delegate. Thanks to that, I developed a passion for this kind of debate and several working and collaboration skills, and I hope to experience nothing but the brilliant talents and passion of all of you!

I am a first-year student at the Universidad Internacional de Cataluña (UIC) in Barcelona, Spain, where I am studying Law and International Relations. Although I am not entirely sure where or what I want to end up working, I am a geopolitics and International Law enthusiast, and I would love to center my career around those two fields. I was born and raised in Barcelona, and some activities I do all the time are running, hanging out with friends to discover new places, painting, and traveling as much as I can, especially backpacking, which I have started to do recently and fell in love with. Traveling to new places has allowed me to attend conferences like NHSMUN, and the experience of it is, without a doubt, one of my favorites ever. Everyone is afraid at first, but the more the conference passes by, the more interesting it gets, so be ready to engage in one of the best MUNs in the world. Just try to be yourselves and do your best, and the rest will do!

As my fellow Assistant Director, Fabiana, has mentioned, this Update Paper has been prepared and written carefully with the newest information regarding both issues that will be discussed on the committee, and if well used, it can be a powerful tool when preparing for the debates! Nonetheless, we encourage you to elaborate proper research, investigate further deep on the topic, and read the latest updates to keep up with today's events to have an efficient debate. We can't wait to see and hear all of you at the committee sessions in March!

I hope NHSMUN serves you all as the best academic experience ever!

Sincerely,

Marta Mateu

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Special Political and Decolonization Committee Assistant Director

Session I



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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the SPECPOL committee! My name is Julieta Ramos, and I am thrilled to serve as one of your Assistant Directors for Session 2.

I was born and live in Lima, Peru. I graduated high school last December. Outside of school and academics, I love exploring my creative side through baking and discovering new recipes from social media. Visiting new cafeterias and reviewing their products is another hobby of mine, there are many in Lima and I still have a long way to go to visit them all. You can also find me watching Disney Channel Originals or TV competitions. Descendants, Camp Rock, Masterchef, and Eurovision (I consider myself an intermediate-level baker, but I definitely cannot sing) are my long-time favorites! Finally, I am an avid Real Madrid supporter and always enjoy watching their games.

My MUN journey began in early 2020, and I served as Head Delegate of my school's delegation as a junior and senior in high school. These experiences not only deepened my interest in global politics but also helped me hone my public speaking and leadership skills. Looking back, MUN has been a transformative journey, shaping me into a more confident and thoughtful individual while reminding me of the importance of respect and teamwork both as a delegate and as a person. Above all, the friendships I have made along the way are what I treasure most.

As a former high school delegate, I completely understand the nerves and uncertainty that are often present in the moments leading up to the conference or the session themselves. SPECPOL is a large committee, but every time you speak, your bravery and dedication will shine without no doubt. Avery and Renata have worked hard for months to make this committee special, and we could not be more grateful for having them as our directors.

Regarding me as an AD, I value strong management skills in both calm and chaotic situations, so I always appreciate strategic moves inside the committee (as always, respectful and diplomatic). I am excited to meet you and help make this edition of NHSMUN an unforgettable experience. My final advice would be to enjoy every moment of the conference and remember that respect and teamwork are the key to thriving as a delegate. MUN is a unique opportunity to have fun and meet amazing people while learning outside the traditional classroom atmosphere. If you have any questions about MUN, the committee, or anything else, please don't hesitate to reach out!

Best,

Julieta Ramos

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Special Political and Decolonization Committee Assistant Director

Session II



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Dear Delegates,

My name is Madhav Mandala, and I am beyond honored to serve as your Assistant Director for SPECPOL this year.

I am currently a first-year Aerospace Engineering student at the Georgia Institute of Technology, but I am originally from Edison, New Jersey. When I am not studying, I am either doing fluids work with our school's rocket team, (the Yellow Jacket Space Program), or aerodynamics simulations for HyTech Electric Racing. I love spending time with my friends and adore going out to eat. I will be going everywhere to eat at this conference.

I started Model UN in 9th grade and became Director-General for my high school delegation. I have been to NHSMUN as a delegate myself three times before, gaveling my last conference on DISEC. This will be my fourth year at NHSMUN, and I am super excited to be returning as an Assistant Director. Quite frankly, I was terrible at Model UN for most of my high school career, but I seemed to have figured it out slowly as I spent more time in committee and more time delivering speeches. Model UN has also been one of my favorite memories throughout high school, as I have met some of my closest friends and strengthened previous friendships through the conference. Trust me when I say you want to make memories with fellow delegates at NHSMUN. MUN is all about meeting new people and having a great time.

One of our core values here at NHSMUN is diplomacy. It is something I hold very high regard, and I hope you all can help me foster a very welcoming and enjoyable environment for all delegates. Part of this means exploring various subtopics that our committee topic encompasses. There are so many different subtopics, and I am looking forward to hearing lots of debate on the various intricacies of protecting freedom of speech around the world. I love when people can weave in unique approaches to problems and come up with novel solutions that have practical applications, so try your best to think about every piece of the problem and develop thorough solutions that will account for most, if not all situations.

Each and every one of you guys will do amazing, as long as you come prepared and try your best. I look forward to seeing all of you on the committee!

Best of luck,

Madhav Mandala

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Special Political and Decolonization Committee Assistant Director

Session II





SPECPOL

NHSMUN 2025



TOPIC A:

ENSURING THE SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS IN CONFLICT ZONES

Photo Credit: Maysun Abu-Khdeir Granados

Introduction

From the disputed waters of the South China Sea to the complex politics of Venezuela, modern conflict zones have transformed professional reporting into an increasingly dangerous career. There are many risks including danger in military conflicts, organized state repression, arbitrary detention, and deliberate destruction of press freedoms through repressive laws. Governments often try their hardest to manage what gets reported and find ways to utilize the press to report on pro-government news. Reporting the news has become a high-stakes responsibility that raises questions about how the international community can protect these vital eyewitnesses to history while guaranteeing their ability to support the free flow of information.

In both the South China Sea Conflict and the Venezuelan crisis, the government plays an important role in ensuring the safety of journalists. If journalists are successively protected, this increases the visibility of the government, independent media outlets, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) dedicated to defending freedom of speech and the safety of journalists. The South China Sea has seen conflict since the 1970s, with territorial conflicts over the area between China, Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Considered a conflict zone, this area holds immense value, carrying USD 3.36 trillion worth of global trade through it annually, nearly a third of the global maritime trade.¹ China is deeply reliant on this trade, with a large portion of all their trade passing through the sea. The area itself is rich in crude oil and natural gas and claims over it would boost the economy of the country it belonged to. The main countries involved in this conflict are China, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia. All of these countries have made claims over the geographic makeup of the South China Sea.

In July 2024, Nicolás Maduro unconstitutionally claimed victory in the Venezuelan Presidential Elections. However, the opposition, led by Edmundo González, the actual winner, and María Corina Machado, rose to advocate for democratic freedom.² Protests erupted both inside and outside Venezuela, criticizing the election's irregularities and lack of transparency,

and showing support for González. The current government has resorted to force to silence the opposition and consolidate its regime, which has been ongoing since 1998. This included at least 70 violations of press freedom within the first 15 days after the election results were released.³

The South China Sea Conflict

The discovery of oil was the primary cause of the increase in claims, and the Philippines and Vietnam immediately began occupying areas. China began increasing its relevance in the area. In the latter half of the 1970s, the Philippines and Malaysia began claiming the Spratly Islands, a big point of contention between all of the countries involved. The Philippines even issued a decree declaring the northwestern part of the islands as part of the Philippines.⁴ There have been continuous disputes regarding these islands because of their importance to trade and stops, but some have been defined already as belonging to a specific country.⁵ Since then, each of the related countries has pushed to increase their relevance in the area, and the tensions have continued to exist, with power shifting slightly but remaining at a relative standstill. This dispute gained a lot of media attention again relatively recently, with the situation escalating again with a Korean ship sailing “too close” to the disputed islands in 2018,

1 Jacque Schrag, “How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?” ChinaPower Project, January 25, 2021, <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>.

2 Alonso Moleiro, “María Corina Machado Rechaza Reconocer Como Ganador a Maduro: ‘Venezuela Tiene Un Nuevo Presidente Electo y Es Edmundo González,’” El País América, July 29, 2024, <https://elpais.com/america/2024-07-29/maria-corina-machado-rechaza-reconocer-como-ganador-a-maduro-venezuela-tiene-un-nuevo-presidente-electo-y-es-edmundo-gonzalez.html>.

3 “Venezuela: RSF Counts 70 Violations of Press Freedom in 15 Days,” Reporters Sans Frontieres, accessed December 21, 2024, <https://rsf.org/en/venezuela-rsf-counts-70-violations-press-freedom-15-days>

4 Ronald Echalar Díaz, “Chanrobles Virtual Law Library,” PHILIPPINE LAWS, STATUTES AND CODES - CHAN ROBLES VIRTUAL LAW LIBRARY, Accessed December 27, 2024, <https://www.chanrobles.com/presidentialdecrees/presidentialdecreeno1596.html>.

5 ICJ, “Sovereignty over Pedra Branca/Pulau Batu Puteh, Middle Rocks and South Ledge,” July 24, 2003, <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/130>.

causing more tensions from everyone with a global increase in concern regarding China's rigidity with the borders it has placed, which are also still in contention.⁶ However, Chinese governments have been hypocritical in their requests, requiring other countries to request permission to travel through their waters. Additionally, they have exercised their right multiple times into Alaskan territory under the pretense of innocent travel. Overall, this area has continued to be dangerous for all the parties involved, and most importantly, the journalists reporting on this problem.

Since August 2024, there have been numerous advancements in this conflict. On August 31, 2024, there was a collision of Chinese and Philippine Coast Guard vessels in the South China Sea, with both parties claiming that the opposition positioned themselves to force the crash.⁷ Following this event, in October of 2024, China increased its military presence to track other vessels, maritime or aerial.⁸ Additionally, there was

an official claim made by Indonesia that the Chinese claims over some islands have no legal basis and are therefore invalid.⁹ These have been issues for the past few decades, and tensions continue to rise due to risky actions on both sides. While these events seem to be isolated from journalistic rights, the problem is that journalists are spread everywhere throughout this problem. A large component of most conflicts is propaganda-based and involves both sides attempting to control the media press regarding a situation.¹⁰ So when an unbiased third party—such as Western media outlet CBS—gets its hands into the conflict, the world is exposed to more of the real truth, instead of the falsifications that both sides may perpetuate. In this conflict, Filipino and Chinese journalists are stationed in the area at all times, covering all confrontations in the area at all times, often attempting to spin events to make their countries appear better. In the collision between the Philippines and China, there were journalists from 60 Minutes, a CBS media

⁶ Nikkei Asia, "South Korean Warship Sails by Disputed South China Sea Islands," September 28, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210514003108/https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-Korean-warship-sails-by-disputed-South-China-Sea-islands>.

⁷ Neil Jerome Morales and Joe Cash, "China, Philippines Accuse Each Other of Ramming Ships in South China Sea | Reuters," *Reuters*, August 31, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/chinese-coast-guard-says-philippine-ship-rammed-chinese-vessel-south-china-sea-2024-08-31/>.

⁸ The Guardian, "China Building 'counter-Stealth' Radar on Disputed South China Sea Reef, Satellite Pictures Suggest," October 26, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/26/china-building-counter-stealth-radar-on-disputed-south-china-sea-reef-satellite-pictures-suggest>.

⁹ Raissa Robles and Amy Sood, "Will Indonesia-China Development Pact Validate Beijing's South China Sea Claims?" *South China Morning Post*, November 11, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3286097/indonesias-china-pact-natuna-islands-criticised-grave-mistake-risks-territorial-rights>.

¹⁰ Michelle Ngo and Narayani Sritharan, "The Media's High-Stakes Game in the South China Sea," *Inkstick*, November 25, 2024, <https://inkstickmedia.com/the-medias-high-stakes-game-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

Philippine Air Force FA-50 Fighting Eagles fly alongside U.S. Air Force F-15C Eagles over the South China Sea

Credit: Airman 1st Class Alexis Redin



subset, on the ship that got hit.¹¹

This collision of Coast Guard vessels was a massive event that has endangered journalists in this area. The vessel's mission itself was to resupply ships and stations in the South China Sea outposts for the Philippines. Knowing this, the 60 Minutes program partnered with them to get a firsthand look at the conflict to attempt to portray it accurately. However, the Filipino ship was rammed in the middle of the night, at roughly four a.m. with the entire crew—including the journalists—on edge with life jackets on, clubs ready to attack potential ship borders. This is a situation that people who are not active military members should not be in. The journalists were extremely lucky as the collision was not going to cause loss of life, but it had a very real chance of doing so. More than just 60 Minutes, a lot of journalists embark on these dangerous journeys to report the situation from a firsthand perspective, which is often critical in ensuring the proper dissemination of information. Also, because of the standstill between the countries in the South China Sea, there was not any intent for warfare, and so the journalists did not believe there to be much of a problem in reporting the situation.¹² When morning came, the journalists from 60 Minutes saw that they were surrounded by Chinese vessels, and were put at a standoff with the Chinese. They had no way to negotiate their way out of the situation and instead were forced to abandon their first stop of the resupply in their still-damaged ship. Moreover, the Chinese had leveraged their media and journalists to paint this as a Filipino-led operation. They claimed that the Philippines had Western journalists on board to garner the Chinese bad press. The information of journalists on board was leveraged by the Chinese to paint an objectively negative situation into a positive one for the Chinese, despite the reality being different. The journalists that had gone to simply report on the status of the situation were instead used to make the Philippines appear to be aggressive.

Regardless of the outcome of this situation, journalists are put

in danger. This raises the issue that as non-military members, they're at risk of the repercussions of an attack intended for the military. Currently, the Geneva Convention, which lists many international laws in wartime, defines journalists as merely civilians.¹³ Because of this problem, the Geneva Convention needs more specificity concerning journalists. Clarification on whether attacking a ship full of military and journalists (civilians) is still considered a war crime is necessary. The reclassification of journalists internationally is essential and will help the international community protect them adequately. The qualifications they currently have do not fit them into any position in the military, yet they choose to enter conflict zones. They are a third party that is often one of the first to get injured or even die. Journalists often need to decide if they want to pick a side or remain neutral, which can also have consequences for their safety. This situation in particular raises questions about how journalists should be defined internationally and whether they have any requirements they need to fulfill before entering conflict zones. There needs to be a guarantee that they remain impartial and so defining the support they need for that is critical. Most of the value in their work comes from information gathering and their impartiality. It is what makes them trustworthy and a reliable source of information. But in pursuing those, they often lose security, and we must prevent their loss of life as critical personnel.

Within this conflict specifically, there are both Chinese and Filipino journalists covering all of the confrontations in the South China Sea, and these journalists are subject to attacks from the opposing side. This threat has been especially prevalent for Filipinos who fear attacks from Chinese military personnel. The reason for this is that the Chinese have drawn a "nine-dash line," a claim that covers more than 90 percent of the sea that the Philippines and the other involved countries refuse to acknowledge.¹⁴ The nine-dash line includes all of the islands in the South China Sea, and both Malaysia and the Philippines are struggling to counter, despite China's claims having no

11 Cecilia Vega, "Conflict between China, Philippines Could Involve U.S. and Lead to a Clash of Superpowers," CBS News, September 15, 2024, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-philippines-conflict-could-involve-us-60-minutes-transcript/>.

12 International Crisis Group, "Philippines: Calming Tensions in the South China Sea | Crisis Group," May 24, 2024, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/philippines-south-china-sea/philippines-calming-tensions-south-china-sea>.

13 RSF Resource for Journalists' Safety, "Appendix I: Protection of Journalists in War Zones," December 18, 2013, <https://safety.rsf.org/appendix-i-protection-of-journalists-in-war-zones/>.

14 Hannah Beech, "South China Sea: Where Did China Get Its Nine-Dash Line?" Time, July 19, 2016, <https://time.com/4412191/nine-dash-line-9-south-china-sea/>.

basis. As a result, both of these countries are put in danger of fighting on territory that is not even officially China's. The inherent problem with journalism like this is the proximity requirement. Informative and transparent journalism relies on firsthand accounts and understanding what the conflict entails.¹⁵ To achieve this, there has been journalist embedding as part of a Filipino "transparency campaign."

The Filipino media strategy involves exposing China's aggressive action in these waters, such as the event with the 60 Minutes media crew. The Philippines is attempting to leverage neutral information sources to depict the difficulty of their relations with China and to help garner international support in the conflict.¹⁶ Their strategy is aimed to make the situation as transparent as possible, as the Philippines believes that China is inherently in the wrong, and a transparent look into the picture would help them. However, despite the good intent of the strategy, in the journalists' journeys, they find themselves in difficult physical conditions beyond just the safety threat. They are often forced to sleep on floors, have limited space, and no guarantee of food. Furthermore, they face accusations of falsifying information and footage from China, further harming their reputation and career as journalists. While the Philippines attempts to defend itself against these allegations, they are not always successful. China is attempting to leverage massive social media platforms such as TikTok and Facebook to disseminate pro-China propaganda but has largely failed to reshape public opinion. They are trying to leverage it to help paint a strong nationalistic narrative, which they use social media control to achieve. They can easily manipulate most people's social media feeds, eventually pushing their information to the rest of the world in easy-to-consume bits of information, further supporting them.¹⁷ However, thanks to Filipino information initiatives, they have not seen much success.

The goal of journalists on either side is to serve as a tool

for transparency and accountability, despite that goal being adulterated in many instances. The problem that arises with government-sanctioned journalism is that it becomes difficult to distinguish between transparency and propaganda, specifically because of the source of the information. The connection between journalist content and government involvement, particularly with what protection they offer journalists, must be removed. Furthermore, the routine maritime patrols are increasingly becoming more dangerous for the embedded journalists, and they are at increasing risk of losing their lives. Ensuring we can protect journalists in these conflict zones while ensuring that their lives are at minimal risk is also paramount. Journalists are the world's window into conflicts. Without them, information dissemination is slow, censored, and biased. But as demonstrated by the South China Sea conflict, they face difficult conditions and are at risk of losing their life in this conflict zone.

Aftermath of the 2024 Presidential Elections in Venezuela

Venezuela has suffered long-term consequences of economic and political instability, resulting in a humanitarian crisis and more than seven million refugees worldwide.¹⁸ Journalists position themselves as frontline defenders of the truth in a context where transparency and free speech are lacking. However, they face a scenario where covering the aftermath of the Venezuelan elections means compromising their integrity, image, and as a result, their security. Maduro's unconstitutional government has implemented several restrictions on free speech, which compromise the overall panorama of human rights in Venezuela. Four of them stand out: mass arrests and detentions, an exponential increase in political prisoners, an Anti-NGO Law, and restrictions on the freedom of the press.

The first measure has been the most relevant since the presidential elections were held on July 28, 2024. It consists

¹⁵ AG Sulzberger, "Journalism's Essential Value," The New York Times Company, May 24, 2023, <https://www.nytc.com/press/journalisms-essential-value/>.

¹⁶ Dr Aaron Jed Rabena, Dr Matthew Sussex, Dr Sonika Gupta, and Alan Oxley, "The Philippines' Four-Pronged South China Sea Strategy," Australian Institute of International Affairs, July 17, 2024, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/the-philippines-four-pronged-south-china-sea-strategy/>.

¹⁷ Vision of Humanity, "TikTok Algorithm: Why It Isn't Really a Social Media App." September 5, 2021, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/why-tiktok-isnt-really-a-social-media-app/>.

¹⁸ "Venezuela Situation - Global Report 2024," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, accessed December 21, 2024, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/venezuela-situation-global-report-2023>.



2024 Venezuelan protests after presidential election

Credit: Confidential

of mass arrests and detentions, one of the most impactful uses of force in the country. Within three days of the results being released, more than 1,000 protesters were arrested, and two days after that number increased to 2,200.¹⁹ As the use of force has increased exponentially in the past few months, opposition journalists covering these events are exposed to harassment and physical harm.²⁰ They are one of the most prominent groups to face detention due to their power in the media to influence citizens against the current government.

Politicians have also been victims of the government's use of force, with two arrests being notable worldwide. Firstly, the opposition's former Deputy of the National Assembly of Venezuela Freddy Superlano, his detention was public on social media and highlighted as a serious case of human rights violations, to this day the government has not allowed him to communicate with family members or lawyers. Additionally, his location is unknown, making this not an arrest but an extrajudicial kidnapping.²¹ Secondly, Edmundo González,

ran successfully against Maduro in the presidential elections. He was constantly active right after the elections, calling for international support, which made him one of the main targets of Maduro's government. As a result, in September he was granted political asylum in Spain.²² By November, the number of recorded political detainees increased to 1,848.²³ With the main opposition political figures now out of the radar of the Maduro government, it is difficult to predict or assert if journalists will be able to receive political support to continue advocating for freedom of speech in the country. In the worst-case scenarios of prison, detention, and murder, which are now becoming a common practice, journalists could seek aid from main opposition parties. However, that is now a distant possibility for Venezuelan journalists as the government is also resorting to other forms of violence and human rights violations.

The government's main targets now are politicians and journalists, with the passports of the latter being taken away or

¹⁹ Ione Wells, "Venezuelans Fear for Relatives after Mass Arrests," BBC News, August 2, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c147k7kzvwko>.

²⁰ "Thousands of Arrests and Terrorism Charges: Nicolás Maduro Intensifies Persecution of Opponents in Venezuela," El País English, August 9, 2024, <https://english.elpais.com/international/2024-08-09/thousands-of-arrests-and-terrorism-charges-nicolas-maduro-intensifies-persecution-of-opponents-in-venezuela.html>.

²¹ Wells, "Venezuelans Fear for Relatives after Mass Arrests,"

²² Mauricio Torres et al., "Venezuelan Opposition Candidate Edmundo Gonzalez Lands in Spain after Disputed Election," CNN, September 9, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/09/08/americas/venezuela-opposition-candidate-gonzalez-spain-intl-hnk/index.html>.

²³ Isabella Cota, "Many Journalists Have Left": How Post-Election Repression Compounded Press Freedom Fears in Venezuela," International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, November 15, 2024, <https://www.icij.org/news/2024/11/many-journalists-have-left-how-post-election-repression-compounded-press-freedom-fears-in-venezuela/>.

annulled.²⁴ As explained before, this is due to the power they have in changing the narrative of the events or presenting an unbiased one, that has happened throughout the aftermath of the presidential elections. This evidence shows that Maduro's dictatorship is not only excessively applying the use of force to maintain stability but also committing further violations of human rights that leave journalists in a vulnerable position to flee the country or document real events happening in Venezuela.

As a result of mass arrests in December, Venezuela broke its record of political prisoners with 2,200 arrested individuals, and among them there are seven teenagers.²⁵ Within 72 hours of being arrested, two individuals were found dead, with their family members citing deplorable prison conditions and lack of medical attention as the causes of the fatalities.²⁶ In November, local NGO Foro Penal reported the release of prisoners in four different prisons, which meant that the government progressed slightly in protecting freedom of expression.²⁷ However, this was a mere act and as of December 16, 2024, the number of fatalities has further increased to 27 dead prisoners and 200 injured due to excessive torture in the prisons.²⁸ This results in more journalistic content that journalists report to expose the crimes that the state is committing, but as repression increases, it is of high risk to do so.²⁹ Maduro has not effectively addressed poor prison conditions or the deaths of detainees, which are issues overshadowed by the impactful news of releasing at least 70 individuals in November.³⁰ This reveals the dependence on force and oppression in Venezuela's justice

system, which is used as a weapon to crush the opposition and not for accountability purposes. These harsh prison conditions and casualties serve as a warning that those who intend to oppose the government will suffer, which places journalists in a dangerous position. Journalists benefit from increased access to material and testimonies presented to international authorities, but the harsh conditions they face make the act of publishing this information a significant risk.

Non-Governmental Organizations have also been considered a threat by the Venezuelan Government. As a result, on August 15, 2024, the Anti NGO Law was passed.³¹ The law imposes harsh control on non-governmental organizations to restrict their activities. This control is achieved by four main strategies: extensive registration required, restricting operations contrary to the state's interest, limiting foreign funding, making disclosure of donors to NGOs mandatory, and allowing the government to suspend or dissolve these entities. In addition, this allows the government to identify people benefiting NGOs that work against them.³² As a result, Maduro and his regime have full control of the main humanitarian-focused opposition in Venezuela.³³ Restricting NGO involvement is part of a broader state policy to suppress the opposition, as these organizations tend to provide critical information useful for journalists.³⁴

With NGOs now at risk of fines or closure, journalists and independent media outlets covering the ongoing crisis may lose access to first-hand data. As a result, journalists face danger

24 Cota, "Many Journalists Have Left': How Post-Election Repression Compounded Press Freedom Fears in Venezuela,"

25 Juan Forero and Ryan Dubé, "Venezuela Never Had so Many Political Prisoners. Seven of Them Are Teens," Wall Street Journal, December 14, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/world/americas/venezuela-never-had-so-many-political-prisoners-21-of-them-are-teens-19675ab7>.

26 Alonso Moleiro, "Dos Presos Políticos Muertos En 72 Horas: Alarma Por El Abandono En Las Cárceles Venezolanas," El País América, December 17, 2024, <https://elpais.com/america/2024-12-17/dos-presos-politicos-muertos-en-72-horas-alarma-por-el-abandono-en-las-carceles-venezolanas.html>.

27 Ido Vock, "Venezuela Frees Dozens of Political Prisoners after Election Unrest," BBC News, November 17, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5yx5qzzyppo>.

28 Alonso Moleiro, "Dos Presos Políticos Muertos En 72 Horas: Alarma Por El Abandono En Las Cárceles Venezolanas," El País América, December 17, 2024, <https://elpais.com/america/2024-12-17/dos-presos-politicos-muertos-en-72-horas-alarma-por-el-abandono-en-las-carceles-venezolanas.html>.

29 Cota, "Many Journalists Have Left': How Post-Election Repression Compounded Press Freedom Fears in Venezuela,"

30 Regina García Cano and Andry Rincon, "Venezuela Releases from Prison Some of the Thousands Detained after Presidential Election," AP News, November 16, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/venezuela-election-maduro-gonzalez-arrests-protests-release-815e8b91cb1ec76268c8b1da81f90b2f>.

31 "Venezuela Legislators Approve Law to Regulate NGOs," Reuters, August 15, 2024, accessed December 22, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/venezuela-legislators-approve-law-regulate-ngos-2024-08-15/>.

32 The Anti-NGO Law Approved in Venezuela: Its History and Scope," Directorio Legislativo, August 15, 2024, accessed December 21, 2024, <https://directoriolegislativo.org/en/the-anti-ngo-law-approved-in-venezuela-its-history-and-scope/>

33 Florantonia Singer, "Venezuela Cierra El Cerco Alrededor de Las ONG Con Una Nueva Ley de Fiscalización," El País América, August 15, 2024, <https://elpais.com/america/2024-08-15/venezuela-cierra-el-cerco-alrededor-de-las-ong-con-una-nueva-ley-de-fiscalizacion.html>.

34 "Venezuela's New Law on NGOs," Human Rights & Public Liberties, August 22, 2024, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://liberties.aljazeera.com/en/venezuelas-new-law-on-ngos/>.

by being uncertain of the information they would be able to display to the public in the future since investigative reporting would be in the worst case nearly impossible to develop. Two relevant NGOs in Venezuela have been evidenced to be impacted: Un Mundo sin Mordaza and Instituto Prensa y Sociedad (IPYS). The former releases annually the Venezuela in Figures report, where they collect information about the human rights violations and impact in the country.³⁵ On the other hand, IPYS is an organization that focuses on defending freedom of the press as its main priority. The Anti-NGO law has hindered its ability to operate effectively by reducing its capacity to support journalists and monitor press freedom violations.³⁶ These constraints have impacted the safety of journalists in Venezuela by leaving them more vulnerable to state repression, as they have lost one of the most pivotal supports in the local context. As a result, self-censorship has gained popularity because of the fearful environment that the government has created in Venezuela.

As a response to these restrictions directly targeting NGOs, international entities have publicly condemned the government. A group that includes 30 national and international organizations act as signatories for a petition that urges the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to renew the mandate of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela.³⁷ Venezuela has also implemented aggressive actions to suppress the freedom of the press. Currently, Venezuela ranks 156th out of 180 in the World Press Freedom Index, with its situation being categorized as “very serious”.³⁸ Journalists are now unable to report recent events under the freedom of the press principles for private or independent media outlets. This is a result of detentions targeted towards first-line opposition battellists, a

lack of information available to create media pieces, and a vast amount of them fleeing the country or being arrested.

The daughter of opponents of Maduro, Ana Carolina Guaita was detained at Maiquetía Airport on August 20, 2024. After the arrest, her location became unknown, which raised major concerns about forced disappearances that directly targeted journalists. Recent reports have claimed that her detention was connected to political ties that her family built with Edmundo González’s opposition campaign.³⁹ This case highlights an intimidation and fear tactic that the government is implementing against independent journalists who are on their own and lack security. The international community has reacted by taking measures to address the issue and restore safety for journalists. Firstly, international support for media outlets and journalists who have been victims of censorship has increased this year. The Swedish Government has stood out with its plans to help journalists in Venezuela by increasing funding by USD 10 million, citing it as a “way to help independent journalists to be able to report on the developments and document the restrictions on human rights and freedoms that are being imposed in the country.”⁴⁰ The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency is behind the provision of aid, destined to independent media outlets to increase their available resources to operate effectively under the challenging environment Venezuela is undergoing.⁴¹

These government restrictions are a key point for the discussion of the protection of journalists in conflict zones, for which three points will be labeled as imperative to be considered. Firstly, delegates must consider the role of the state in ensuring safety for journalists, because they can either be frontrunners

35 “2024 World Press Freedom Index – Journalism under Political Pressure,” Reporters Sans Frontières, accessed December 21, 2024, <https://rsf.org/en/2024-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-under-political-pressure>.

36 “Sin Mordaza: Annual Report on the General Situation of Human Rights in Venezuela,” La Patilla, October 31, 2024, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.lapatilla.com/2024/10/31/sin-mordaza-annual-report-on-the-general-situation-of-human-rights-in-venezuela/>

37 “Venezuela: UN Rights Council Should Renew Experts’ Mandate,” Amnesty International, September 12, 2024, accessed December 21, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/09/venezuela-la-onu-debe-renovar-el-mandato-de-expertos-independientes/>.

38 “Unprecedented Venezuela Repression Plunging Nation into Acute Human Rights Crisis, UN Fact-Finding Mission Says,” September 17, 2024, accessed December 22, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/09/unprecedented-venezuela-repression-plunging-nation-acute-human-rights-crisis>.

39 “Ana Carolina Guaita, La Periodista de Padres Opositores Desaparecida Tras Ser Detenida En Venezuela,” El País América, August 24, 2024, accessed December 21, 2024, <https://elpais.com/america/2024-08-24/ana-carolina-guaita-la-periodista-de-padres-opositores-desaparecida-tras-ser-detenida-en-venezuela.html>.

40 Beata Stur, “Sweden Supports Free and Independent Media in Venezuela,” European Interest, August 21, 2024, <https://www.europeaninterest.eu/sweden-supports-free-and-independent-media-in-venezuela/>.

41 “New Swedish Support to Free and Independent Media in Venezuela,” Government Offices of Sweden, August 20, 2024, <https://www.government.se/press-releases/2024/08/new-swedish-support-to-free-and-independent-media-in-venezuela/>.

in the fight for their safety or the first in line for their lack of protection. Secondly, sovereignty is a concept that the General Assembly cannot challenge in any scenario, which is one of the reasons why taking action is not an easy task for the international community. Finally, it is essential to remember misinformation, disinformation, and the differences between both concepts and how both issues influence not only the population consuming news but also journalists reporting.

Conclusion

While press freedom has been an issue for decades, recent international events have further threatened the safety of journalists. Today, journalists face an increasing array of risks as they work to expose these violations, often risking their safety and well-being to bring crucial stories to light that otherwise would remain hidden. Since November of 2024, many journalists in Venezuela have left due to overarching repression. Multiple journalists have been arrested, which has served as an intimidation tactic by the government, making investigative reporting more difficult for independent news outlets in the country.⁴² In the South China Sea conflict, Reporters Without Borders has been calling attention to China's immense crackdown on press freedom and threats to journalists.⁴³ Reports of torture, arbitrary detentions, as well as systematic censorship and harassment of reporters have remained a top issue as of November of 2024 and are projected to get worse if no actions are taken to address the issue.⁴⁴ As the General Assembly, SPECPOL's mission is to address issues of censorship and journalist protection as a special political issue. Under the given context and considering the complex factors that make places such as the South China Sea and Venezuela a conflict zone, delegates in SPECPOL should aim to develop new and more effective mechanisms for the protection of journalists. Following the committee's mandate is also essential since that will allow a clearer focus on the solutions that will be put forth at the conference.

Delegates should also consider defining what is a conflict zone under the parameters of the committee and each delegation's policy, as the concept itself can be broad. Finally, as the South China Sea Dispute, the Venezuelan crisis, and protests in the aftermath of the 2024 presidential elections are ongoing issues, we suggest you keep yourselves updated on the topic. New information is released every day, and informational pieces coming out from any media outlet can be of great importance to address the safety of journalists.

⁴² Isabella Cota, "Many Journalists Have Left": How Post-Election Repression Compounded Press Freedom Fears in Venezuela," International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, November 15, 2024, <https://www.icij.org/news/2024/11/many-journalists-have-left-how-post-election-repression-compounded-press-freedom-fears-in-venezuela/>.

⁴³ "The Chinese Regime's Fierce Repression of Journalists Hidden Behind a Day of Celebration," *Reporters Without Borders*, November 13, 2024, <https://rsf.org/en/chinese-regime-s-fierce-repression-journalists-hidden-behind-day-celebration>.

⁴⁴ "The Chinese Regime's Fierce Repression of Journalists Hidden Behind a Day of Celebration," *Reporters Without Borders*, November 13, 2024, <https://rsf.org/en/chinese-regime-s-fierce-repression-journalists-hidden-behind-day-celebration>.



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NHSMUN 2025



TOPIC B:
SAFEGUARDING PEACEKEEPERS IN ARMED CONFLICT

Photo Credit: Capt George Christie

Introduction

Peacekeeping operations are integral to minimizing conflict, establishing security, and promoting peace worldwide. These operations work to protect civilians, support elections, assist in maintaining the law, disarm combatants, stabilize conflicts, implement peace agreements, and transition to stable governments.¹ Despite their importance, many aspects of the operations need to be worked on to ensure a positive impact and outcome in the missions and to guarantee the peacekeepers' safety.

Currently, many peacekeeping missions are enduring challenges that compromise the safety of the communities and the peacekeepers. Moreover, each peacekeeping mission is unique in its operation method, the UN resolutions that support it, and the countries that assist it. Many missions address similar problems, but each uses different tactics to address the issues. It is also important to remember that peacekeepers' safety goes beyond physical security and health. Proper integration with the communities they serve, mental health, the host country's collaboration with the peacekeepers and the UN, and many more are key aspects that contribute to the overall safety and protection of the peacekeepers. The UN is currently working on new mandates and initiatives to solve these individual and common issues that arise in peacekeeping missions. Some problems at the forefront include enhancing peacekeepers' training, working for better communication between the countries involved, and clarifying the rules of engagement with the community.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is a current peacekeeping mission facing many challenges in active duty. One of the major issues is the several attacks on peacekeepers, the headquarters of the mission, and the local communities. UNIFIL has a unique geopolitical implication since it currently monitors a complex Middle-East conflict with a delicate humanitarian crisis. UNIFIL has been monitoring the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah since October of 2023.² Before the conflict, it was monitoring the cease-fire between Lebanon and Israel and even had a formal mediation mechanism.³ UNIFIL also provides a better understanding of a non-state actor's influence, like Hezbollah,

in active conflict. These groups tend not to follow the rules created by missions, which creates a dangerous environment for civilians and peacekeepers. Moreover, UNIFIL sheds light on the diplomatic relationships between Lebanon and Israel, which is essential for a long-term solution to regional peace. The operational challenges, new mandates' initiatives, and the UNIFIL mission help to visualize the current problems regarding peacekeepers' safety. Both topics highlight pressing issues in peacekeeping operations that must be solved to guarantee the safety and security of all the personnel involved.

Operational Challenges and New Mandates' Initiatives

The operators of current UN peacekeeping missions have faced several challenges while carrying out these missions in recent months. Several political events have occurred, both civil and international, that have made it difficult to perform such missions in the conflict territories. For example, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the ongoing civil war in South Sudan have been particularly challenging. Political problems in UN peacekeeping missions often make it more difficult to plan and perform the missions as the environment is constantly changing. While geopolitical tensions are present, one of the main problems is the lack of clear political strategies and mandates. A mission will be more effective if it has a clear strategic direction. However, without proper political backing, peacekeeping missions often face challenges regarding the fulfillment of their functions and goals.⁴ Moreover, evolving conflicts and unstable political environments pose difficulties

1 "Peacekeeping 101," *Better World Campaign*, Accessed January 20, 2025, <https://betterworldcampaign.org/un-peacekeeping>.

2 Associated Press, "UN Peacekeepers in Southern Lebanon Are in the Crosshairs of Israel's War on Hezbollah," AP News, October 11, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/unifil-peacekeeping-lebanon-israel-peacekeeping-b03091462dbb2e025a6fcad1acdba08f>.

3 Sammy Westfall, "What is UNIFIL, the U.N. Peacekeeping Force in Lebanon?" *The Washington Post*, October 14, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/10/12/unifil-un-peacekeeping-what-is-force-lebanon-united-nations/>.

4 Security Council Report, *September 2024 Monthly Forecast*, August 30, 2024, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2024-09/un-peacekeeping-12.php>

for traditional models that are still being used. A common problem that peacekeepers face is navigating the relationship between the host countries of the missions and peacekeepers, as it is crucial to perform the tasks of the mission fluently. Unfortunately, the tension between host countries and the UN has been a problem in the past few months, as it seems to be more difficult to establish a trusting relationship between the organization and such countries.⁵

The frustration of states and local communities has been increasing from the end of 2023 to mid-2024 due to the perceived ineffectiveness of missions in certain areas.⁶ Disinformation campaigns contribute to these negative narratives about missions, which make it more difficult for peacekeepers to safely operate in their host countries. Furthermore, in cases such as UNIFIL, the need for greater political support for unification to resolve conflicts is emphasized, since the lack of cooperation is slowing down the peace process and operational efficiency.⁷ The frustration of host countries with the United Nations often creates obstacles for the UN forces. Several missions have reported

multiple violations of agreements such as the status of forces agreements (SOFA) or of mission status (SOMA). The SOFA and SOMA agreements consist of bilateral or multilateral treaties that define the legal position of military forces and civilian personnel. They are deployed by one or more states or by an international organization in the territory of another state with the latter's consent.⁸ The main difference between both agreements is that the SOFA agreement applies to peacekeeping operations with military components, which are referred to as the armed forces or military units deployed as part of a UN mission.⁹ Not respecting such agreements has resulted in the limitation of movement for the blue helmet personnel and has made mandated tasks more difficult. Blue helmet personnel are soldiers, police officers, and civilians who work on the ground in peacekeeping operations. For example, in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) mission, 125 breaches of agreements or similar incidents were recorded during the data collection period. These incidents show that without support from local forces and collaboration from the national government of the host country, the tasks

5 United Nations, "United Nations Peacekeeping 'Remains a Cornerstone of Multilateralism in Action', Stresses Under-Secretary-General, at Security Council Open Debate" <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15813.doc.htm>
 6 Security Council Report, *September 2024 Monthly Forecast*.
 7 Office of the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, *Action for Peacekeeping*, New York: September 2024, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/a4p_5th_report_september_2024_final_for_distribution_2.pdf
 8 Aurel Sari, "Status of Forces and Status of Mission Agreements under the ESDP: The EU's Evolving Practice", *European Journal of International Law*, no.19, (February 2008): 67-100, <https://academic.oup.com/ejil/article/19/1/67/430816?login=false>
 9 "Status of Forces Agreement", Casque Bleu, last modified September 28, 2020, https://casquebleu.org/index.php?title=Status_of_forces_agreement

UNFICYP peacekeepers patrolling the buffer zone
 Credit: Thaizacastilho



mandated by the UN become nearly impossible to carry out effectively. Additionally, ambitious peace mandates often lack the necessary local political support. These issues are being taken into consideration for the reforms in the mandates for 2025.¹⁰

The operations of peacekeeping missions are also challenged by the changing nature of conflicts and new confrontations in neighboring regions. These changing conflicts can cause collateral damage. An example of this is UNIFIL as the confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians has resulted in the involvement of the Lebanese authorities in the conflict, causing tensions among the peacekeepers in the Lebanese territories.¹¹ Some other missions, such as the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), are in the process of building and regaining trust. However, changes in the conflict have been happening daily between the opposing parties involved in the conflict, which are between Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities.¹² Due to such alterations, the execution of the missions slows down significantly.¹³ Another similar case is found in the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), as the presence of the mission is linked to Serbia's relationship with Kosovo which continues to generate conflict.¹⁴ In the case of this mission, there has been a clear dissatisfaction from the majority Kosovar Albanian population who have at times challenged the authority of the mission.¹⁵

According to Resolution 2378, approved by the UN Security Council on September 20, 2017, Secretary General Antonio Gutierrez was requested to establish a system for monitoring the performance of annual peacekeeping missions and teams.¹⁶

Every September, an information session should be carried out accompanied by a debate.¹⁷ In September 2024, the fifth annual report of Action for Peacekeeping Plus (A4P+) was published, which consisted of an initiative designed to improve the impact of peacekeeping operations and ensure the implementation of the reforms derived from the initiative on the ongoing missions.¹⁸ The report presents various information reflecting the political problems that arise as operational difficulties. Some of these are the presence of armed groups (state and non-state actors), terrorist activity, unstable governments, and political instability.¹⁹ These are common political problems found in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs), which are countries that are classified as economically poorer or low-income.²⁰ This initiative is currently being implemented. It includes seven priority areas, including improving cooperation with host countries, strategic communication, and increasing accountability.²¹ Reports are provided periodically, however, there have been no significant changes in the last report back in September 2024 regarding operational improvements. The report also states that there has been a lack of change due to the inadequate financing for the missions.²² Despite this, there have not been any new reforms for the current mandates and peacekeeping models. Nonetheless, the data included in such reports plays a big part in the investigations that are being carried out for the proposal of new reforms.

Some have suggested enacting new policy reform through an investigative project that would help uncover some of the main issues within peacekeeping. This project would be developed to address the distrust of local authorities and the sudden changes that occur during conflicts in host countries. Some of the new focuses proposed include a shift towards more quick

¹⁰ Security Council Report, *September 2024 Monthly Forecast*.

¹¹ Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, *Action for Peacekeeping*.

¹² "UNFICYP Fact Sheet", United Nations Peacekeeping, accessed January 5, 2025, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/unficycp>

¹³ Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, *Action for Peacekeeping*.

¹⁴ "UNMIK Fact Sheet", United Nations Peacekeeping, accessed January 5, 2025, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/unmik>

¹⁵ Josephine Mintel, "Kosovo 1999-2008 Milestones, Transfer of Power, and The Parallel Education System," The Richard and Judith Mintel Archive of Records, November 30, 2020, <https://www.mintel.org/about/josephine-mintel-musician-and-archivist/accidental-tourists-the-case-of-the-united-nations-mission-in-kosovo/>.

¹⁶ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2378, S/RES/2378(2017), September 20, 2017, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2378.pdf

¹⁷ Security Council Report, *UN Peacekeeping Operations: Open Debate*. September 7, 2024, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2024/09/un-peacekeeping-operations-open-debate.php>

¹⁸ Security Council Report, *September 2024 Monthly Forecast*.

¹⁹ Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, *Action for Peacekeeping*.

²⁰ "Less economically developed countries", Britannica Kids, accessed January 5, 2025, <https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/less-economically-developed-countries/476290>.

²¹ Security Council Report, *September 2024 Monthly Forecast*.

²² Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, *Action for Peacekeeping*.

and adaptable models of peacekeeping as well as an increased focus on political remediation alongside peace enforcement. Investigations can be modeled after the ones that are currently being led by El-Ghassim Wane, previously appointed leader of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) mission. He is working on reviewing the current mandate models for the design of new ones in future missions. Some examples he has been reviewing are the projects in Somalia and Ethiopia, and it is expected that there will be a Peacekeeping Ministerial Session in the city of Berlin in May 2025.²³ Although there is still little information about the project, Wane has set the goal of laying out 30 “made-to-measure” models that describe what UN Peacekeeping has done in the past and could do in the future. This list will assist the United Nations in having different options when having to select the most precise peacekeeping model for current and future missions.²⁴ The project is being carried out by a group of experts, including individuals such as Paul Williams (professor at George Washington University) and Ai Kihara-Hunt (professor at the University of Tokyo). Among others, some of these new models include deploying peacekeepers to emerging conflict zones, supporting the organization of free and fair elections, and protecting shipments and convoys of humanitarian aid. These models are designed to fit into Wane’s objectives, which consist of adapting peacekeeping to a “fracturing world” that has seen an increase in geopolitical tensions and conflicts.²⁵

Aside from Wane’s project, the Security Council has been focusing on enhancing the partnerships between regional organizations and the UN peacekeeping missions.²⁶ As mentioned, new missions are being designed for emerging conflicts, mostly in Ethiopia and Somalia. Cooperation with

local governments is, indisputably, a crucial part of designing such missions and having them be as effective as possible. One of the biggest focuses currently is the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) mission. On August 15th, 2024, Resolution 2748 was adopted to determine the future of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS).²⁷ This is a peacekeeping mission led by the African Union, a continental organization made up of 55 African countries founded in Africa.²⁸ The UN offices in Somalia and the Security Council are actively involved as the internal conflict in the country continues to evolve. In addition, there’s been a framework created that aims for the improvement of collaboration between regional forces and the UN, called the “Joint UN-AU Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security.” The Resolutions 2719 and 2748 are crucial starting points of this framework because they refer to the financial patterns established by the UN for financing such peacekeeping missions and defending the peacekeepers involved.²⁹ This framework plays a key role in the evolution of peacekeeping missions in Africa due to the cooperation between the UN and the African Union. This will be a significant advancement as Africa currently holds the most peacekeeping operations in the world.³⁰

Aside from pairing with regional organizations, the UN is collaborating closely with the governments of The Republic of Kenya, supported by the government of the United Kingdom, and the Republic of Korea to carry out new projects for the formation of peacekeepers from the regions of Africa, Asia, and the Pacific during 2025.³¹ There will be two courses happening, one in Kenya and another in South Korea, and they will cover the Core Pre-Deployment Training Materials in an updated version. Such courses will be open to participants from troop

²³ Security Council Report, *September 2024 Monthly Forecast*.

²⁴ Dali Ten Hove, “The Future of UN Peacekeeping in a Fracturing World: Experts Weigh In” *PassBlue*, November 23, 2024, <https://www.passblue.com/2024/11/23/the-future-of-un-peacekeeping-in-a-fracturing-world-experts-weigh-in/>

²⁵ Ten Hove, “The Future of UN Peacekeeping in a Fracturing World: Experts Weigh In.”

²⁶ Security Council Report, *September 2024 Monthly Forecast*.

²⁷ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2748, S/RES/2748(2024), August 15, 2024, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/242/97/pdf/n2424297.pdf>

²⁸ “About the African Union”, African Union, accessed January 3, 2025, <https://au.int/en/overview>

²⁹ Security Council Report, *October 2024 Monthly Forecast*, September 30, 2024, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2024-10/un-au-cooperation-4.php>

³⁰ United Nations, “Communiqué of Eighth African Union-United Nations Annual Conference, Held in Addis Ababa, 21 October”, News release, October 21, 2024, <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sg2266.doc.htm>

³¹ “Peacekeeping Training Update”, United Nations Peacekeeping Resource Hub, December, 2024, <https://peacekeepingresourcehub.un.org/en/news>

and police-contributing countries to the UN peacekeeping missions.³² Some of the updated contents regarding the last version of the course from 2017 are sexual exploitation, abuse, conflict-related sexual violence, protection of civilians adapted to the ongoing conflicts, and human rights.³³

Case study: UNIFIL

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was created in 1978 after the Israeli Forces invaded Southern Lebanon. The UN Security Council established it through resolution 425 to confirm the withdrawal of the Israeli troops, restore peace, and help the Lebanese government regain its authority.³⁴ In 2006, the UN Security Council updated UNIFIL's mandate with resolution 1701, which authorizes the peacekeepers to “take all necessary action in areas of deployment of its forces and as it deems within its capabilities, to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind,” and to “ensure the security and freedom of movement of United Nations personnel”.³⁵ This was made after a 30-day war between Israel and the Lebanese paramilitary group Hezbollah.³⁶ Over the last 45 years, UNIFIL has been asked by the Lebanese government to stay in its position. However, in October 2024, the peacekeeping operation was victim to attacks from the Israeli military, injuring more than a dozen troops. The conflict between Lebanon and Israel first escalated in 2023, when Lebanon's paramilitary group Hezbollah launched rocket attacks into Israel in support of Hamas. Israel then fired at Southern Lebanon to retaliate, where UNIFIL's headquarters

are located.³⁷ Lebanese troops and UN peacekeepers deployed to Southern Lebanon, and Israeli troops withdrew from the same area thanks to Resolution 1701.³⁸ However, Hezbollah stayed near the Blue Line border and strengthened its military assets.³⁹ The end of hostilities in September 2024 was mainly due to Resolution 1701, but some Israeli officials are doubtful about the ceasefire. Israel claims they should have the right to strike back at Hezbollah, but if this were to happen, many civilian and military lives would be at stake.⁴⁰

Resolution 1701 was created in August 2006 after a unanimous decision of the UN Security Council after two Israeli soldiers were abducted by Hezbollah in July and taken into Southern Lebanon.⁴¹ The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) launched air, ground, and sea missions into Southern Lebanon. After this, both sides launched attacks at each other, causing the death of 49 Israeli civilians and 121 IDF soldiers. Moreover, 1,384 civilians and 1,244 IDF soldiers were wounded, and Hezbollah fired over 3,990 rockets into Israeli territory. On August 11, the UN Security Council drafted resolution 1701, which calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, the disarmament of militias and paramilitary groups operating in Lebanon, and no armed forces south of the Litani River except UNIFIL and Lebanese forces. Hezbollah has not followed the resolution, launching several attacks into Israeli populations injuring several civilians.⁴²

In 2024, resolution 1701 came back into effect when Hezbollah and Israel attacked Southern Lebanon since the elements involving the attack were very similar to the 2006 conflict. Many politicians and experts believe the resolution is the key to resolving the current conflict. Even though the

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36 Tamer Morris, “The Targeting of UN Peacekeepers in Light of the Attacks on UNIFIL”, *Opinio Juris*, April 11, 2024, <https://opiniojuris.org/2024/11/04/the-targeting-of-un-peacekeepers-in-light-of-the-attacks-on-unifil/>

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41 Zeidan, “Britannica”

42 “The Second Lebanon War: A Timeline”, IDF Editorial Team, July 7, 2016, <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/hezbollah-and-lebanon-an-in-depth-examination-under-hassan-nasrallah-s-leadership/the-second-lebanon-war-a-timeline/>



The withdrawal line of Israeli and Lebanese armed forces
Credit: United Nations Interim Force In Lebanon

resolution has been violated in the past, with UNFIL's help and crisis management, resolution 1701 may be the reason for the permanent ceasefire.⁴³ On October 6, 2024, UNIFIL warned about airstrikes and ground attacks over the Blue Line, a 120-kilometer line of withdrawal patrolled by the mission that separates the Lebanese and Israeli forces since Israel's first withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000.⁴⁴ Due to the recent attacks on the mission from both Hezbollah and the Israeli military, the Israeli government requested that UNIFIL leave its post and relocate. This request was denied, and the UN voiced its objection to the IDF stationed close to the peacekeepers.⁴⁵ According to the Principles and Guidelines for UN Peacekeeping Operations, the UN needs the host country's consent to deploy a mission in its territory. However, it is a non-legal consent required for safety reasons.⁴⁶ UNIFIL is only stationed in Lebanese territory, therefore, Israel cannot request the withdrawal of peacekeeping forces.⁴⁷ Even

though peacekeeping missions operate with the consent of all parties, UNIFIL is an agent of the United Nations. Legally, they only need the UN's approval to withdraw from their posts.⁴⁸ Additionally, both Lebanon and Israel agreed to the UN Security Council's authority when they entered the United Nations, making both countries unable to remove the peacekeepers from their posts.⁴⁹

Regarding the legal status of peacekeepers, the international community deploys peacekeepers who are considered impartial, which means they are not parties to the conflict, gaining civilian status and falling over the same protections. The Rome Statute prohibits the attacks on peacekeepers in Article 8(2) (b)(iii).⁵⁰ The Rome Statute is an international treaty active since 2002 created by the International Criminal Court (ICC) with jurisprudence over genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression.⁵¹ Israel is not a part of

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46 Gilder, "Articles of War"
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49 Moris, "Opinio Juris"
50 International Criminal Court, *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, (The Netherlands: International Criminal Court), <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2024-05/Rome-Statute-eng.pdf>
51 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, "International Criminal Court", accessed December 28, 2024, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/publications/core-legal-texts/rome-statute-international-criminal-court>

the Rome Statute; therefore, the ICC cannot investigate and prosecute crimes committed in Israeli territory.⁵² However, since the peacekeepers and their operations are considered civilian projects, any attack toward them would immediately fall under international humanitarian law. Peacekeepers can only lose their citizen status if they engage in direct hostilities. However, the Special Court of Sierra Leone, a court established by the Sierra Leone government and the UN to prosecute crimes against humanity, established that peacekeepers may retain their status as long as they act in self-defense and use proportional force. Only if and when UNIFIL engages in disproportionate force against IDF would they lose their status, be subject to international humanitarian law, and be considered to be a party to the conflict.⁵³

The attacks began when an Israeli tank was fired into a UNIFIL observation tower in their headquarters. After that, several parts of UNIFIL's headquarters were targeted consistently. Israel forces fired at two UNIFIL troops and destroyed bunker entrances and cameras in the headquarters, limiting the resources and personnel and injuring several peacekeepers.⁵⁴ Despite this, UNIFIL has been reporting the attacks and helping civilians out of danger. There is also a high probability that UNIFIL will respond to these attacks, as it has done previously under resolution 1701.⁵⁵ Even though peacekeepers play a crucial role in avoiding any escalation between Israel and Lebanon, UNIFIL peacekeepers may have to go to shelters or leave their current posts if there is a threat to their safety. However, UNIFIL has been helping train the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Lebanese Navy to take over the peacekeepers' tasks.⁵⁶ The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, believes that UNIFIL peacekeepers are in danger due to the current Hezbollah-Israel conflict.

However, UNIFIL and the UN Security Council still refuse to allow the peacekeepers to leave their posts and leave the Lebanese government and civilians alone.⁵⁷

There is a very thin line between the protection of peacekeepers and the fulfillment of their mission. The UN has a risk management method that balances the likelihood of a risk and the benefits of taking said risk. Lately, the UN has opted for taking the risk and a passive approach to reduce the risks.⁵⁸ Taking into account the recent increasing risks to peacekeepers deployed in Southern Lebanon, the UN Undersecretary-General for Peace Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, testified to the UN Security Council to increase protection for peacekeepers in Lebanon, which includes limiting activities, relocating personnel, confining peacekeepers to shelters, and reducing peacekeepers by 20 percent.⁵⁹

Conclusion

The United Nations peacekeeping missions play a vital role in maintaining peace and stability in conflict-ridden areas. However, they still face multiple difficulties that limit their operational effectiveness when performing the missions. As was discussed, one of the major issues is the lack of support from host countries. Peacekeeping requires political backing and trust from such countries to succeed, but many countries are reluctant to provide support to the peacekeepers. This distrust has led to violations of agreements meant to guide the relationship between peacekeepers and local governments, making it harder for them to carry out their tasks. Political problems and the lack of clear strategies in the missions make these operations more difficult as the environment and political framework are constantly changing. Modern conflicts have

52 The Rome Statute and the International Criminal Court Factsheet, "The Institute of International and European Affairs", July 13, 2022, <https://www.iiea.com/blog/the-rome-statute-and-the-international-criminal-court-factsheet>

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55 Albert Trithart, "What Is Behind Israel's Deliberate Attacks on UN Peacekeepers in Lebanon? An Interview with Karim Makdisi", IPI Global Observatory, October 30, 2024, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2024/10/what-is-behind-israels-deliberate-attacks-on-un-peacekeepers-in-lebanon-interview-with-karim-makdisi/>

56 Daniel Dickinson, Explainer: How UN peacekeepers meet the challenge of escalating conflict in Lebanon, *UN News*, October 8, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/delegate/how-unifil-meet-challenge-escalating-conflict-lebanon>

57 AJC Global Voice, "What You Should Know About UNIFIL, UN Resolution 1701, and Southern Lebanon", November 26, 2024, <https://www.ajc.org/news/what-you-should-know-about-unifil-un-resolution-1701-and-southern-lebanon>

58 Christian Werner, "Balancing Risk: Ensuring the Safety of U.S. Peacekeepers in U.N. Missions", *War on the Rocks*, November 12, 2024, <https://warontherocks.com/2024/11/balancing-risk-ensuring-the-safety-of-u-s-peacekeepers-in-u-n-missions/>

59 "UN peacekeepers in southern Lebanon are in the crosshairs of Israel's war on Hezbollah", AP News, October 14, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/unifil-peacekeeping-lebanon-israel-peacekeeping-b03091462dbb2e025a6fcad1acdba08f>

become unpredictable, making the traditional and original models of peacekeeping less effective. From the end of 2023 to mid-2024, the frustration of host countries has increased significantly, due to the ineffectiveness of missions in some territories. Even if technology has been developed to improve the performance of these missions, building trust with local governments remains critical.

The lack of coherence in the relationship between Israel and Lebanon, in addition to the actions of non-state actors such as Hezbollah, is slowing down the mission's pace, leaving UNIFIL's objectives as a constant challenge for the peacekeepers operating in that zone. Missions must adapt quickly to changing situations, and the UN is working on such changes through projects such as Action for Peacekeeping Plus. These investigations are being carried out by the past leader of the mission MINUSCA El-Ghassim Wane, who is analyzing the current peacekeeping models and forming new ones to address current and future peacekeeping missions or the new training courses led by the South Korean and Kenyan governments. However, the progress is slow, and a lack of consistent funding and resources continues to hold back a big part of these extremely needed reforms. The challenges peacekeepers face are reflected in the case of UNIFIL, as this mission operates in a changing environment and has recently faced attacks from local militant forces and Israeli forces. These attacks significantly threaten the safety of peacekeepers and make it harder to fulfill the mission's tasks. Despite all the danger, UN peacekeepers continue doing their work, often taking personal risks to achieve the mission's goals.

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The National High School Model United Nations Conference (NHSMUN) is a project of IMUNA, a non-profit organization formally associated with the United Nations Department of Global Communications (UNDGC). IMUNA is dedicated to promoting global issues education through simulation.

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