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## FACT SHEET

# THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

### BACKGROUND

The Security Council is one of the main six 'organs' of the United Nations organisation. The Security Council has responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. When there is a threat to peace, the council usually recommends that the parties try to reach an agreement by peaceful means. Sometimes the council investigates and mediates between the parties. It can also recommend the use of force to bring about peace. It can also recommend the use of force to bring about peace. It can also recommend the use of force to bring about peace.

### FUNCTIONS AND POWERS

Under the UN charter the Security Council has the power to:

- Maintain international peace and security
- Recommend action when peace is threatened
- Call on members to impose sanctions or use force
- Take military action against an aggressor

### MEMBERSHIP

The Council has 15 members. Five of these are permanent and ten are elected through the UN General Assembly for a two-year term. The permanent members are: The United States of America, China, France, Russia and The United Kingdom. The presidency of the council rotates alphabetically each month. Non-member nations may participate but not vote when involved in an issue. A representative from all 15 members must be present at all times at the UN headquarters.

### MEMBERSHIP OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL IN 2008

China Permanent member  
 France Permanent member  
 Russia Permanent member  
 U.K. Permanent member  
 USA Permanent member  
 Belgium (Term ends 2008)  
 Burkina Faso (Term ends 2009)  
 Costa Rica (Term ends 2009)  
 Croatia (Term ends 2009)  
 Indonesia (Term ends 2008)  
 Italy (Term ends 2008)  
 Libya (Term ends 2009)  
 Panama (Term ends 2008)  
 South Africa (Term ends 2008)  
 Vietnam (Term ends 2009)

### VETO POWER

Each council member has one vote. Decisions require nine votes, including the votes of the permanent members. A permanent member can veto a resolution. This is the power of veto.

### OPERATIONS

The UN has been involved in 60 peacekeeping operations since 1948, with 17 current operations. Recently Aotearoa NZ has made contributions to peacekeeping operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Aotearoa NZ's Army is committed to UN peace support operations.



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around the globe and contributes troops, training and supplies on a regular basis. Recent UN operations that Aotearoa NZ is currently involved with include:

- Afghanistan, UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
- Iraq, UN Assistance Mission in Iraq
- Korean Peninsula, UN Command Military Armistice Commission
- Kosovo, UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
- Middle East, UN Truce Supervision Organisation
- Sudan, UN Mission in Sudan<sup>1</sup>

The UN does not necessarily command these operations directly. For example: "...of New Zealand's 400 Defence personnel and 75 police deployed in peace support missions in 14 countries... the majority are taking part in operations not managed by the UN, but which have UN and regional endorsement in one form or another".<sup>2</sup>

These missions include:

- Afghanistan, Provincial Reconstruction Team
- Solomon Islands, Regional Assistance Mission
- Bosnia Herzegovina, European Union Force
- Sinai, Multinational Force and Observers

### LIMITATIONS OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

The Security Council is able to be "steamrolled" by one of the five permanent powers. One very wealthy member can lobby the other members to vote with it by promising aid and trade deals. For example, in 1990, Yemen was a member of the Security Council and voted against attacking Iraq. The USA called this "the most expensive no vote in history" and promptly cut US\$20 Million in aid to the country. The Security Council has come under criticism in recent years – particularly over its lack of influence over world powers with regards to the invasion of Iraq by the USA and its allies. Aotearoa NZ's Minister of Foreign Affairs has also discussed the growing trends towards regional and multilateral interventions which are not UN led, amid constraints upon the capacity and efficiency of UN led peace support: "Just as the number of conflict and post-conflict situations has increased, so too has the complexity of the international responses".

### SECURITY COUNCIL REFORM

As of November 2007, reform of the Security Council had been underway for fifteen years.

An open-ended working group on potentially increasing the membership of the Security Council was established in 1993. In 2005 at the World Summit, Heads of State and Government expressed support for the early reform of the SC, as of 2006 the General Assembly had decided this work should continue.<sup>3</sup> Reform is highly contentious, and it will be very challenging to find a solution that all member states will agree to: "the General Assembly met from 12 to 14 November 2007 in a plenary debate to discuss Security Council reform. The meetings did not result in any concrete steps; instead they clearly illustrated the continued divisiveness of the issue".<sup>4</sup>

### RELEVANT LINKS

[www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

[www.un.org/sc/members.asp](http://www.un.org/sc/members.asp)

[www.un.org/Docs/sc/](http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/)

[www.un.org/peace/bnote010101.pdf](http://www.un.org/peace/bnote010101.pdf)

[www.army.mil.nz](http://www.army.mil.nz)

### OTHER WEBSITES

[www.globalpolicy.org/security](http://www.globalpolicy.org/security)

- 1 [www.mfat.govt.nz/Foreign-Relations/1-Global-Issues/Security/Peacekeeping-Operations.php](http://www.mfat.govt.nz/Foreign-Relations/1-Global-Issues/Security/Peacekeeping-Operations.php).
- 2 [www.beehive.govt.nz/ViewDocument.aspx?DocumentID-31026](http://www.beehive.govt.nz/ViewDocument.aspx?DocumentID-31026).
- 3 [daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06494/10/PDF/N0649410.pdf?OpenElement](http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06494/10/PDF/N0649410.pdf?OpenElement).
- 4 [www.centerforunreform.org/node/293](http://www.centerforunreform.org/node/293).