UN Security Council: “We Cannot Afford to Fail”

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Schedule of topics:

Week 1

Marginalized by the Cold War (1946-1956)

The superpower Cold War rivalry and the atomic bomb marginalized the United Nations machinery created in 1945. Key challenges to international peace and security were managed entirely or largely beyond the UN. Yet, the Security Council’s first war reversed the Korean War (1950-1953), but it had also badly strained the institution. From the Suez Canal experience in 1956 emerged a UN force – the first peacekeeping mission of any size.

Week 2

Carving out its own niche (1957-1967)

Between 1951 and 1959, the Security Council met only sporadically, in 1959, it met just five times. The Council was, however, able to carve out a niche in monitoring and peacekeeping. On 13 July 1960, UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, called for a meeting on his own initiative. The United Nations’ most ambitious operation yet would start in Congo. The Six-Day War in 1967 placed in stark relief the Council capacities and incapacities. It could not act quickly to head off a crisis.

Week 3

Exploring new challenges (1968-1985)

As the pattern of direct confrontation between the blocs settled into latent conflict, the Council explored new security challenges. The 1966 expansion had ensured that more countries from the developing world would have Council seats. As if to underscore it, a resolution on the Middle East passed in 1973 without the affirmative votes of the most powerful. In 1979 to 1983, the world appeared to lurch toward instability and confrontation. The Council could do very little in Cambodia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Grenada.

Week 4

New spirit of cooperation (1986-1993)

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With the winds of international change and abandonment of the superpower confrontation, the climate improved markedly in the mid-1980s. This political renaissance brought a “meeting of the minds” among the key global players. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 represented a key moment in international relations, the Council had not encountered such sustained media attention since the 1960s. A sleepy club for high politics became a frenetic world governance body supervising Yugoslavia, Somalia and Iraq.

**Week 5**

**Much greater creativity (1994-2001)**

Since 1990 there has been a sharp drop in the use of the veto, accompanied by a culture of accommodation. This remarkable post-Cold War unity ended in the late 1990s and with it the notion that the Council could easily assume the governance role that many of its supporters fervently hoped it would play. The Iraq, Kosovo and Rwanda experiences had demonstrated how difficult it was for the Council to manage a crisis while navigating political differences.

**Week 6**

**The seashore is more crowded and disorderly (2001- )**

The mushrooming of activities in the 1990s presented a range of risks for the Council. But the fears that the Security Council would be unable to recover from the political breach on Iraq in 2003 proved to be exaggerated. Nor was there any sign that the world had lost interest in the Council. For all its drama the Iraq, Libya and Syria debates were like the debates about Kosovo. While the future is uncertain, there is still no getting around the Council, a fixed address for diplomacy.

**Recommended readings for continued learning:**

*Annual reports of the Security Council* (https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/sc_annual_reports)


**Other interesting resources:**