

- Administrative and Budgetary (Fifth Committee); and
- Legal (Sixth Committee).

Security Council

The Security Council is the main organ responsible for maintaining global peace and security. It has 5 permanent members—namely, China, France, Russia (which assumed the Soviet Union’s seat), the United Kingdom and the United States—and 10 members elected by the General Assembly to serve two-year terms. On October 8, 1998, Canada was elected to serve a new two-year term as a non-permanent member; this is the sixth time since 1948 that Canada has sat on the Security Council. The new term runs from January 1, 1999, to December 31, 2000.

Council members are on call 24 hours a day in case an international crisis occurs. Any UN member or the Secretary-General may call a Security Council meeting if a threat to peace exists. Even a non-member state may request a meeting if it feels that such a threat exists. When a meeting is called, those countries directly involved in the issue under consideration

are invited to take part in discussions but they may not vote on Council resolutions. It takes a nine-member majority for a resolution to be carried, but none (except for procedural questions) can be adopted if opposed by

one of the five permanent members (giving them a “veto”).

In the event of a conflict pitting one or more countries against another, the Council can order economic sanctions against the aggressor, and all other UN members are obliged to comply with these. If the sanctions fail to stop the aggression, the Security Council can authorize member states to launch joint military action, as it did in the case of the Korean War in 1950 and when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, as well as in Somalia, Rwanda and Haiti. Although these operations were approved by the Council, they were conducted entirely under the authority of the states that launched them. The Council authorizes such operations only as a last resort, when all peaceful means of resolving a dispute have failed.

In most cases, the Council tries to negotiate a cease-fire between the combatants. Once the fighting stops, UN peacekeeping forces may be sent to keep the two sides apart or to help implement a peace accord.

Last, the Security Council recommends the admission of new members to the UN. It also makes recommendations on filling the posts of Secretary-General and of judges on the International Court of Justice.

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