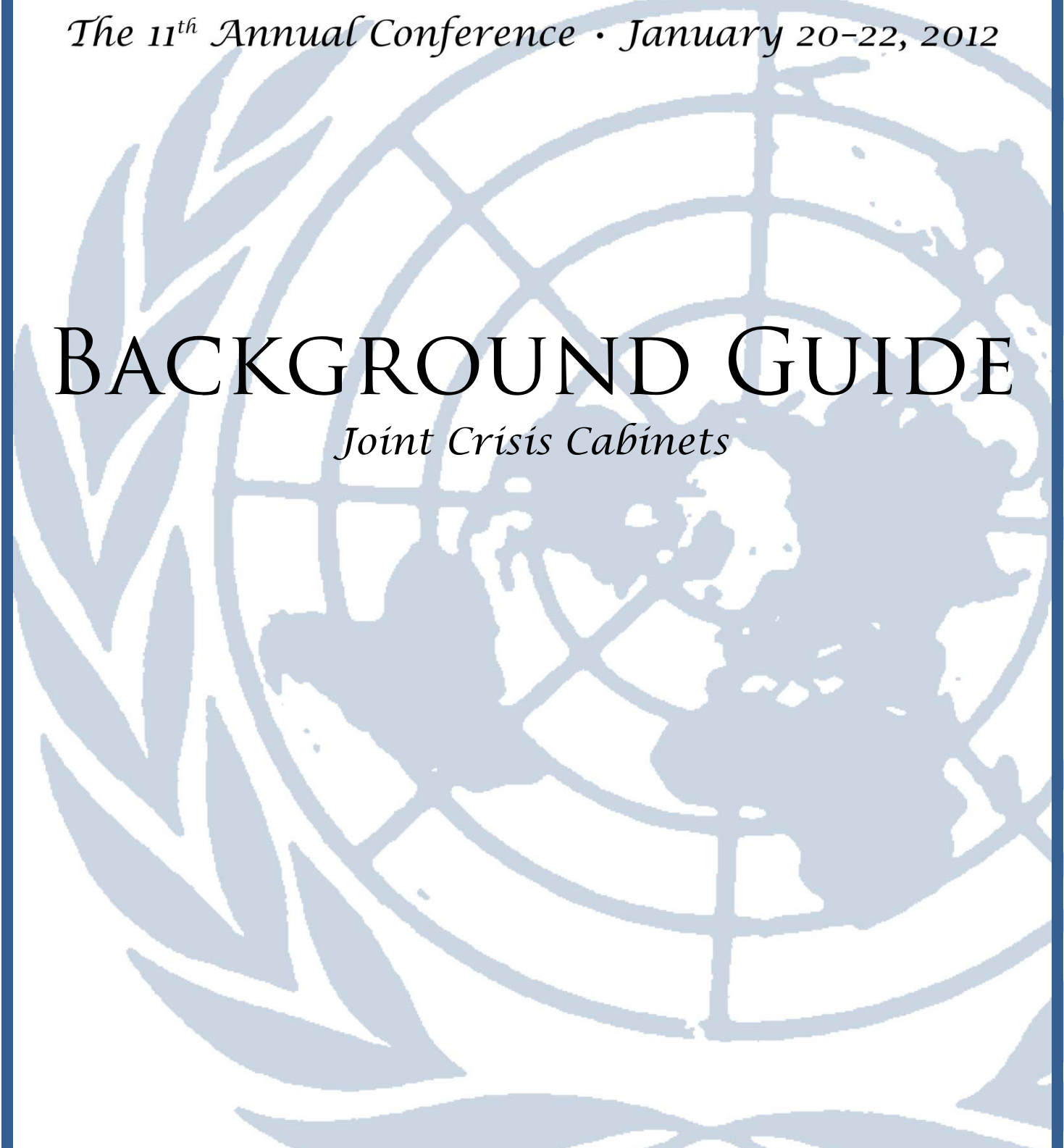


VANCOUVER MODEL UNITED NATIONS

The 11th Annual Conference • January 20-22, 2012

BACKGROUND GUIDE

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JCC: General Background Guide

Global Setting

The year is 2015, and it is a time of renewed international tensions and socioeconomic troubles. With a twist of irony, the world has come to resemble the bi-polar geopolitical situation of the late 20th century. The sole remaining superpower born out of the 20th century's fires, the United States, now suffers from a crippling national deficit and worsening unemployment issues. Its financial limitations have had a detrimental impact on its once unparalleled military power and projection, threatening to tip the US even further into decline from its superpower status. In the meantime, on the other side of the world, a rapidly ascending China, with a powerhouse economy and an increasingly powerful military, has inherited the throne vacated by the former Soviet Union, the old contender to the United States. However, China too is hardly untouched by internal problems, caused by a massive wealth gap and a continually oppressive government. And unfortunately, the world is starting to resemble Cold War-era Earth in another way, as ideological differences between the two countries and China's increasing military presence in the Pacific region contribute to heightening tension not only between the US and China but also with the other countries in the region.

Eurasia

In Russia, failed Neo-Decembrist protests in mid-2012 led to President Putin consolidating significant personal power. Since then, Russia has expressed its exasperation with NATO's new missile shield program in Eastern Europe, and has responded by adding to military spending and developing new avant-garde ballistic missile systems. To the west, pan-Europeanism has been dealt a mortal blow, mired in an economic depression ever since Greece's default during the European sovereign debt crisis. Most European Union member states are preoccupied with issues within their own borders, such as rioting over harsh austerity measures, increasing criminality and violence, the rise of extremist political parties, and recidivist Fascist and Marxist movements. The EU is a feeble ghost of what was once envisioned as a powerful supranational union.

Middle East

In the Middle East, tensions have escalated to a new level. The United States has not let up on its political and financial support for Israel, attempting to leverage that country as a counterweight to the powers of Iran and Pakistan, a volatile wildcard. No appreciable progress has been made towards Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation, and the situation on both sides looks much the same—if, perhaps, even more volatile—as it did five or ten years ago.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has continued to soldier on with its nuclear development program, maintaining that, as a sovereign state, it has the right to carry out such a program for peaceful purposes—and the right to not be scrutinised too closely by international regulatory organisations. Israeli-Iranian relations are at an all-time low, exacerbated by Iran's nuclear program and a 2013 spree of suspicious

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deaths among prominent nuclear scientists in Iran that was widely attributed to the Israeli Mossad. Hardliners in both nations push for violence, and the tension has spilled into the wider international arena. Nevertheless, Iranian authorities continue to act belligerently towards the West, and their relations with both the United Kingdom and France have hardly improved since both embassies were stormed by “student protestors” in late 2011 and early 2012.

North Korea

The isolated Pacific nation of North Korea has continued its brinkmanship with the West well into the second decade of the twenty-first century. Relations have been increasingly rocky since their 2009 successful test of a nuclear weapon, the alleged sinking of the ROKS Cheonan in 2010, and the 2010 shelling of Yeonpyeong Island. The nation’s provocative acts have always been met with near-universal disapproval, but their disproportionate militarisation and possession of nuclear weapons force the international community into a concessional stance. Although Dear Leader Kim Jong Il’s death in the closing days of 2011 have been followed by three years of uncharacteristic silence and a lack of incidents, the situation seems grimmer than it ever has since the end of the Korean War. Although the Kim family still appears to dominate state politics, and Kim Jong Un is the titular Supreme Leader, whisperings of internal strife in the state do not bode well for regional stability. At the same time, an increasingly segregated, starving, and unhealthy society, coupled with disillusionment with the regime caused by increasing bootleg access to outside information, have led to an exponential escalation in the number of refugees from North Korea.

South China Sea

Chief among the territorial disputes that China has faced, and currently faces, is the dispute over maritime claims in the South China Sea. Most notable among these are the conflicts pertaining to the Spratly and Paracel islands. These archipelagos have been under dispute for nearly a century, and have changed hands both diplomatically and militarily in the duration of the conflict. Tensions over these islands has only increased since 2012, when technology conclusively demonstrated that the island groups hold significant oil and natural gas reserves. As well, the strategic benefit for a nation such as China to control these islands would be immense; they are a key area through which millions of dollars of lucrative international shipping passes each day and their claimant would be afforded a greatly extended area of control as they sit on an outcropping of the continental shelf. This material and political benefit has, in the past, led to confrontation between the nations that claim these waters as their own, but naval skirmishes have diminished in the past thirty years with increased attention given to diplomatic means of solving the dispute; however, with diplomatic channels closing in the last few years, all sides have increased their naval operations in the region. Conflict seems inevitable.

United States

The US, now existing as a faint shadow of its former economic glory, is fielding a federal deficit of \$19 trillion and an unemployment rate of 9%. China has holdings of over 25% of US debt, and continues to demand the US to get its financial situation under control. Its structural deficit has led to ballooning

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interest rates that occupy a significant portion of the federal budget and forced extensive cuts into programs that were once sacred. With a record deficit and high unemployment, incidents of protests such as Occupy Wall Street and general strikes have rocketed. The US faces the near insurmountable task of revitalising its floundering economy and restoring satisfaction in its government, if it wishes to protect its reputation as the pinnacle of liberal democracy worldwide. Having already withdrawn the majority of its troops from the Middle East, the United States has found it increasingly difficult to project hard power internationally, compared to the leaps and bounds that China's military has grown by. Unless the United States vastly improves the state of its economy and the efficacy of its legislature, incontrovertibly entailing the reform, restructuring, or reconstitution of existing social welfare and economic programs, it will certainly find itself, at best, once again only one of two world superpowers.

The relationship with China is a delicate one for the US. Although the US perceives China to be a prominent military threat, as China has asserted its sovereignty over regions of the South China Sea, among others, and continued the advancement of its military technologies, the US also reluctantly recognizes the economic importance of the Asia-Pacific region. While it strongly disapproves of China's abysmal human rights record and China's support for countries such as North Korea and Iran, it has grudgingly engaged in an ambivalent but strongly connected relationship with China.

China

Despite having a booming economy, boosted in part by artificial devaluation of the renminbi, which the US labels as illegal currency manipulation, China is internally suffering from a stark disparity in wealth. Factory workers, under poor salaries and working conditions, have grown restless, and the originally isolated incidents of strikes and rioting are more frequent, becoming a major issue for China. As always, there have been voices of dissent within China calling for the dismantlement of the Communist Party and increased freedoms. In both Tibet and Taiwan, independence movements have become even more pronounced, destabilising Chinese claims of sovereignty in the regions.

China has been perceived unfavourably by most Western nations, following its staunch refusal to lend money for the Eurozone bailout funds, which led to what is now a dire fiscal situation and increased political turmoil in the EU. The rapid expansion of Chinese infrastructure is fueled by oil, necessitating China to assert sovereignty over areas of dispute in the South China Sea and to maintain strong ties with Iran, both of which are irksome to the US. China must still tread carefully, since the US remains China's largest trading partner; with an export-oriented economy, China needs to retain its relations with the US in order to keep the same rate of economic growth.

Growing Tensions

In April of 2014, mass protests erupted in Lhasa, Tibet, galvanized by the populist rhetoric and firebrand Tibet Emancipation Movement (TEM). Violence against PLA military personnel and government escalated over two weeks period and culminated in an effective overthrow of Chinese civil and military authorities in the region. A Tibetan nationalist provisional government was formed, and managed to

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drum up a militia dubbed the Tibetan Liberation Army, but their dream was to be crushed as Beijing responded quickly and decisively. The TEM government and TLA were swiftly crushed by a major PLA operation, and forced to sign agreements that officially further cemented Tibet's role as Chinese territory. As we enter 2015, however, tensions in Tibet do not seem to have abated. In fact, the failure of the 2014 rebellion and ensuing reprisal seem only to have exacerbated the situation. Outside of China, Tibetan expatriates have angrily decried the brutality of the PLA in their response to the 2014 rebellion, and continue to attempt to draw attention to China's current tracking down and detaining of dissenters in Tibet. Within Tibet, local Communist officials are as on edge as the party elite in Beijing is. It looks like Tibet is to continue to cause trouble for China.

As we enter 2015, two separate military developments are ongoing. China has embarked on the largest joint-forces military exercise in its history, largely as a tour de force of its vastly improved army, navy, and air force. Along with stunning organisation, co-ordination, and communication, China has thus far displayed the capabilities of its fifth-generation stealth fighter, the Chengdu J-20, and demonstrated the world's first fully operational anti-ship ballistic missile system. Most importantly, China has unveiled its fifth aircraft carrier earlier than previous world estimates, firmly establishing itself as a naval powerhouse. Completely disregarding objections from countries such as the US over possible territorial infringements, China has already conducted its exercises freely in the East and South China Seas, inflaming tensions in the region. November 2014 played host to the first stage of China's military exercises, and the second stage of wargames is scheduled to begin on January 21st, 2015.

At the same time, the United States and Taiwan are in the midst of finalising a massive arms deal. In November 2014, the two countries signed a preliminary agreement, ostensibly for the acquisition of a complete missile defense system for Taiwan, but neither party has been willing to disclose the full contents of the deal—despite diplomatic pressure from Beijing, which does not recognise the Taiwanese state. China has expressed anger with the additional late December American announcement that it would be gradually increasing its contingent of personnel stationed in Asia-Pacific bases by 6000 over the next three months to “protect American interests in the area,” in addition to the 2500 US Marines stationed in Australia since 2013 and 60,000 troops already in the region.

15/01/15—Diplomatic Crisis

At 0300 hours local time, on January 15th, 2015, the White House was informed that an experimental two-seater F-35 Lightning II aircraft had been downed off the coast of Pingtan Island, in the Taiwan strait. The two airmen, Colonel William Sanderson and Captain Chang Chi Kien, were reported as immediately recovered and detained by Chinese officials and en route to Beijing, according to Chinese diplomats.

Today marks January 15th, a day that will surely herald a critical juncture in US-China relations. As of yet, the circumstances surrounding the F-35's crash are not public. The Chinese government has issued a vehement attack on the infringement of their sovereign airspace and warned of retributive measures and a worsening of relations. There are unreliable reports from China that military personnel have flooded the crash site and established a civilian exclusion zone.

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Popular reactions have been predictably polarized, albeit with a dividing effect in China and a unifying one in the States. Republican and Democratic media alike have shown unbridled hostility towards Beijing, spreading a populist sentiment among citizenry. Already, hundreds have gathered in front of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Washington, protesting its actions. In China, reactions have been dichotomized between younger, urban, more educated netizens and rural, older citizens. The former group are no less belligerent or nationalistic in their rhetoric than the latter, but differ in their realpolitik assessment: they favour the release and return of the captured American pilots in exchange for political and economic concessions from the United States. The older generation, many having lived through the revolutionary era, see the event as an act of betrayal and clandestine treachery by the United States and grumble of war.

Reactions from the rest of the world have been largely pacifist. The European Union, which has imposed an arms embargo against China ever since 1989, is expected to issue a collective declaration in support of the release of Colonel Sanderson and Captain Chang. Russia, in contrast, has already endorsed the detainment of the pilots, and voiced disapproval of the United States. Thus far, however, no other nations, either within or without the region, have spoken officially on the matter, and no concrete demands been made by either the US or China.

The world is now anxiously awaiting the official statements and actions of the two global giants involved in this fiasco, the United States and China. Poised on the brink of disaster, volatile regions around the world may erupt in chaos at the slightest wrong move by either power.