



IHSANTRAIN'25

23-24-25 MAY 2025

ECOSOC

study guide

BOARD MEMBERS:

Assem Al-Shaibani, Nuriddin el Yousef

#balancethescales



Table of Contents

1. Letter from the chairboard
2. Introduction
3. Background of key agreements and organizations
 - a. NATO and USMCA
 - b. WTO
 - c. U.S-China Relations
4. Timeline
5. Stakeholders and their positions
 - a. United States of America
 - b. Canada
 - c. Mexico
 - d. WTO
 - e. The International Community
6. Glossary of Items
7. Questions to be addressed
8. Further Reading

#balancethescales



Letter from the Secretary -General

Welcome to Ihsantrain 2025!

I'm beyond excited to finally say those words. Ihsantrain 2025 is here, and trust me, this is going to be so much more than your average MUN conference.

This year, we're building something special: a space where bold ideas matter, where voices rise (respectfully, of course), and where the energy in each committee room will remind you why you joined MUN in the first place. Whether you're here to debate global policy, challenge perspectives, or just nervously step into your first session ever you belong here.

MUN is where I found my confidence, my people, and a surprising amount of late-night work sessions. I hope Ihsantrain 2025 gives you the same energy. Let this be the weekend you surprise yourself, where you speak up even when you're unsure, and where you find not just fellow delegates but lifelong friends.

So bring your passion, your curiosity, and yes your best fits (we all know the MUN fashion obsession is real). This conference is yours to shape.

On behalf of the entire team, I'm so glad you're here. Get ready to question, to grow, and to have an unforgettable time. And don't forget to balance the scales, bring your best arguments and your best vibes.

See you in committee!

With excitement and a lot of admiration,
Leen Almasri
Secretary-General
Ihsantrain 2025

#balancethescales



I. Letter from the President Chair

Dear Delegates,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the ECOSOC committee at IhsanMUN. My name is Assem Al-Shaibani, and I am honored to serve as your President Chair.

Our agenda addresses one of the most significant tensions in modern international economics. The disputes have not only strained trade agreements but also caused ripple effects across the global economy, especially for developing countries.

As ECOSOC delegates, your task is to consider how trade policies affect economic development, cooperation, and global equity. I encourage you to approach this topic with creativity, empathy, and a commitment to realistic policymaking.

We will be here to support you throughout the conference. We look forward to hearing your voices and seeing your ideas shape a meaningful debate.

Best of luck!

Assem Al-Shaibani
ECOSOC President Chair”

#balancethescales



I. Letter from the Deputy Chair

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the ECOSOC committee at IhsanMUN.

My name is Nuriddin El Youssef, and I'm honored to serve as your Deputy Chair.

This year's topic addresses real economic pressure points. Trade disputes are challenging cooperation, slowing development, and deepening inequality—especially in vulnerable regions.

Your job is to respond with clear, grounded solutions. Think beyond the surface. Understand the systems. Build policies that reflect fairness, not just strategy.

We'll be here to support your progress throughout the sessions. Use this space to engage fully and make your contributions matter.

Wishing you a productive debate.

Nuriddin El Youssef
ECOSOC Deputy Chair

#balancethescales



II. Introduction

“When goods don’t cross borders, soldiers will.”

-Frederic Bastiat

Tariff wars are strategic and manipulative but are considered highly disruptive tools that are used in international economic policies. They are not just technical trade measures. They are political statements, economic weapons, and the main initiators for global uncertainty.

A **tariff war** is a cycle of counteracting taxes on imports imposed by one country on another in order to protect domestic industries or punish a trade partner. As a result the targeted country may strike back with similar or even higher taxes. Accordingly, escalating costs, broken supply chains, and reduced global trade efficiency may occur.

#balancethescales



Examples From History

1930s: The U.S. passed the smoot-Hawley tariff which other countries responded to, leading to a collapse in global trade and worsening the Great Depression.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smoot%E2%80%93Hawley_Tariff_Act

2018s-2020: The U.S. -China trade war led to hundreds of billions in tariffs, global market instability, and stressed diplomatic ties.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China%E2%80%93United_States_trade_war

Why This Issue Matters

Trade wars don't stay bilateral. Their effects exponentially spread globally.

#balancethescales



- Tariffs increase prices for consumers and producers
- They disrupt supply chains that purely depend on cross trade cooperation
- They delay production, minimize investments, and result in a slow economic growth
- They significantly affect developing economies and relatively large economies deteriorate.
- Limits global trade systems credibility such as the WTO (World Trade Organization).

In a global economy where products and mainly capital move across borders constantly, a tariff war does not only affect the countries involved. It becomes a global issue.

This agenda focuses on the current tariff conflict involving the following nations:

Canada

The United States of America

Mexico

China

#balancethescales



The conflict initiated by these countries raises legal concerns under the **NAFTA/USMCA** alongside testing the authority of the WTO in addition to exposing the fragility of global economic cooperation.

You will examine not only the causes and consequences but also the role of nations and institutions in attempting to either resolve or escalate the disputes.

Essential questions:

- Are tariffs ethical and a legitimate tool of economic defense, or are they short-term weapons that result in long-term harm?
- Can global trade rules survive in an era where countries aim to shield their domestic industries from foreign competition?

Your mission is to evaluate these questions and find answers that are validated by current economic reality, legal structured systems and diplomatic responsibility.

#balancethescales



III. Background and Key Agreements and Organizations

1. NAFTA and USMCA

a. Signed in 1992, the North American Free Trade Agreement created the world's largest free trade zone. It aimed to eliminate barriers to trade, including tariffs. Negotiated by U.S. President George H. W. Bush, Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, and Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, it phased out nearly all tariffs on products, gave investors the right to sue governments if they believed certain policies hurt profits through the investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) system, strengthened copyright and patent protections across borders, and opened markets for services like banking and insurance.

b. By 2016 NAFTA tripled US trade with Canada and Mexico. It also made consumer goods cheaper across the board in all three countries. Additionally, it boosted agricultural trade and investment across borders.

#balancethescales



c. NAFTA hurt the U.S. job market as many factories moved to Mexico for cheaper labor, particularly affecting the middle class in industrial regions like the Rust Belt. Critics argued it allowed companies to relocate where labor was cheapest, worsening job quality and suppressing wages. The ISDS was also accused of enabling corporations to override public interest laws.

d. In Mexico, NAFTA disrupted agriculture for small farmers, with over two million believed to have lost their livelihoods due to competition from U.S. imports. It also raised environmental concerns, as enforcement of environmental regulations was often poor, leading to issues like pollution and health problems.

e. During his first term, President Donald Trump renegotiated NAFTA calling it “the worst trade deal ever made.” This resulted in The United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA). Implemented in 2020 it introduced stricter rules of origin for automobiles, requiring 75% of parts to be sourced

#balancethescales



from North America. It also strengthened labor protections by guaranteeing Mexican workers the right to form unions and setting minimum wage requirements for certain auto workers. Furthermore, new provisions addressed digital trade and e-commerce. Moreover, a "sunset clause" was added, mandating a review every six years and automatic expiration after sixteen years unless renewed. Finally, U.S. farmers gained greater access to Canada's dairy market.

2. WTO

a. Created in 1995, the World Trade Organization is the only international organization that deals with the rules of trade between nations. Some of its functions include administering trade agreements, settling disputes, and promoting trade liberalization.

b. The WTO is founded on core principles that member states are expected to uphold. These include non-discrimination, transparency, stability, and a binding dispute settlement mechanism

#balancethescales



c. Citing national security, trade deficits, and job losses, President Trump initiated a trade war with China. In 2018, China retaliated by raising its own tariffs on American goods and filed a complaint against the U.S.'s actions to the WTO. Following this complaint, the WTO ruled against the U.S.'s national security defense. The U.S. rejected this ruling and refused to lower tariffs.

d. In March 2018, the U.S. raised tariffs on steel and aluminum from Canada, Mexico, and the EU, among others. Canada and Mexico responded by raising tariffs on American products.

Subsequently, along with the EU, they filed a complaint to the WTO stating that the national security defense used by the U.S. was abusive. In a separate EU case, the WTO ruled that the tariffs violated trade rules. In 2019, as part of the newly negotiated USMCA, the U.S. lowered tariffs on Canada and Mexico, and in turn, they dropped their WTO case.

#balancethescales



3. U.S-China Relations

- a. The Permanent Normal Trade Relations granted to China by the U.S., allowed it to join the WTO in 2001. This led to a dramatic expansion in bilateral trade, but also deepened economic imbalances. While China benefited from global market access, American industries raised concerns about job losses, intellectual property theft, and an undervalued Chinese currency.
- b. Throughout the 2000s and early 2010s, tensions persisted over issues like state subsidies, forced technology transfers, and overproduction in sectors like steel. Although the Obama administration pursued cooperation through bilateral talks and multilateral forums like the WTO, it also sought to counterbalance China through regional efforts such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), from which China was excluded.
- c. In 2018, President Trump initiated a trade war with China as detailed above.

#balancethescales



d. In January 2020, both countries signed a Phase One agreement. China agreed to purchase \$200 billion in U.S. goods and strengthen IP protections, but the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted implementation. Under President Biden, most Trump-era tariffs remained. Instead, focus shifted to restricting China's access to advanced technologies through export controls, particularly in the semiconductor and AI sectors.

e. China responded with export restrictions on strategic minerals like gallium and graphite. Meanwhile, the U.S. began building coalitions with allies to secure supply chains and limit China's influence in critical industries.



IV. Timeline

August 2017 – The U.S. begins investigating unfair trade practices.

March 2018 – The U.S. places new tariffs on steel and aluminum from many countries, including Canada, Mexico, and the European Union, claiming it's for national security.

June 2018 – Canada, Mexico, and the EU respond with their own tariffs on American goods and file complaints to the World Trade Organization (WTO).

July 2018 – The U.S. places new tariffs on \$34 billion worth of Chinese imports. China immediately responds with the same amount in tariffs on American goods.

August–September 2018 – Both countries continue raising tariffs, reaching hundreds of billions of dollars in affected trade.

#balancethescales



December 2018 – The U.S. and China agree to pause the trade conflict and enter negotiations.

November 2018 – The U.S., Canada, and Mexico sign the USMCA to replace NAFTA.

May–June 2019 – The U.S. removes steel and aluminum tariffs on Canada and Mexico. In return, Canada and Mexico drop their cases against the U.S. at the WTO.

September 2019 – The U.S. adds tariffs on more Chinese consumer goods, including clothing and electronics.

January 2020 – The U.S. and China sign a “Phase One” trade deal. China agrees to buy more American products and improve protections for intellectual property.

July 2020 – The USMCA officially goes into effect.

#balancethescales



December 2020 – The WTO rules that the U.S. tariffs on China broke international trade rules. The U.S. disagrees and keeps the tariffs in place.

2021–2022 – The Biden administration keeps most of the existing tariffs on China but starts focusing more on restricting China's access to advanced technologies.

2023 – In response, China announces limits on exporting key materials used in electronics and green technologies.

2024–2025 – The trade relationship remains tense. Both countries still trade but are trying to depend less on each other, especially in high-tech industries.

#balancethescales



V. Stakeholders and Their Positions

1. United States

Has long adopted economic protectionism, using tariffs and trade barriers to shield domestic industries, especially when facing rising competition or concerns about job losses. President Trump's administration sought to reduce trade deficits and revive certain manufacturing sectors like steel and aluminum.

2. Canada

Highly dependent on regional trade with the US, its largest trading partner, with the NAFTA/USMCA agreement being vital to its trade economy. When the US imposed tariffs on steel and aluminum, it directly threatened Canada's key industries, prompting retaliatory measures from the Canadian government. Canada filed legal complaints to the WTO, challenging the US's use of national security as justification for the tariffs. Canada argued that these tariffs violated international trade laws and were unjustified under both agreements.

#balancethescales



3. Mexico

Like Canada, Mexico's economy is deeply entwined with trade with the US. Mexico depends on US markets for exports in sectors such as automotive manufacturing, agriculture, and energy. When the US imposed tariffs, it destabilized these industries, leading Mexico to retaliate with its own tariffs on US goods. Mexico also joined Canada's complaint to the WTO.

4. WTO

Plays a crucial role in mediating global trade disputes, offering a platform for countries to resolve conflicts without escalating to trade wars. During the US-China tariff conflict, the WTO issued several rulings, including one stating that US tariffs on Chinese goods violated international trade laws. However, the US's noncompliance escalated tensions with the WTO.

5. The International Community

Expressed concern over the growing protectionism, as it disrupted global trade flows, hurt consumers with higher prices, and threatened economic stability.

#balancethescales

IHSANTRAIN'25
23-24-25 MAY 2025



Many countries and international organizations pushed for multilateral cooperation to address issues like intellectual property and technology transfer in a fairer, more balanced way, rather than relying solely on unilateral tariffs.

#balancethescales



VI. Glossary

Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS): A mechanism allowing investors to sue governments if they believe certain policies negatively affect their profits, often criticized for allowing corporations to override public interest laws.

Trade War: A situation in which countries impose tariffs or other trade barriers against each other, typically in retaliation for perceived unfair trade practices, leading to escalating economic conflict.

Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR): A trade status granted to countries by the US allowing them to receive the same trade benefits as other countries with which the US has formal trade agreements. China received PNTR status in 2001.

Phase One Trade Deal: An agreement between the US and China signed in January 2020, where China

#balancethescales



committed to purchasing more US goods and improving intellectual property protections.

Tariffs: Taxes imposed by a government on imported goods to protect domestic industries or raise government revenue.

Sunset Clause: A provision in an agreement that causes the agreement to expire after a certain period unless renewed.

Intellectual Property (IP): Legal protections for creations of the mind, such as inventions, designs, trademarks, and copyrights, ensuring the creator can control the use of their work.

Bilateral Trade: Trade between two countries, typically referring to agreements or deals that directly involve two nations.

Multilateral Trade: Trade involving more than two countries, often through international agreements or organizations like the WTO.

#balancethescales



Forced Technology Transfers: A practice where companies are required by the host country's government to share their proprietary technology with local firms, often cited as a major issue in US-China relations.

State Subsidies: Financial assistance provided by a government to local businesses or industries to make their goods or services more competitive in the global market.

Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP): A trade agreement among countries in the Asia-Pacific region, which excluded China, aiming to promote economic integration and reduce trade barriers.

Advanced Technologies: High-tech industries, including fields like semiconductors, AI, and biotechnology, that are often the subject of export controls and trade restrictions.

#balancethescales



Export Controls: Government-imposed restrictions on the sale or export of certain goods, often for national security reasons or to protect technological advantage.

Trade Deficit: A situation where a country imports more than it exports, leading to an imbalance in trade relations.

Protectionism: Economic policies aimed at shielding domestic industries from foreign competition by using tariffs, quotas, and other trade barriers.

#balancethescales



VII. Questions to be Adressed

1. What measures can be taken to prevent the political weaponization of tariffs amongst major trading nations?
2. How can member nations enforce or structurally reform the WTO to ensure the enforcement of previously instated trade treaties?
3. Should countries be subject to international penalties in the case of instigating or escalating a trade war?
4. How can indirectly related but ultimately affected countries work together to protect supply chains and industries during major global economic conflicts?
5. What role can ECOSOC play in alleviating pressures on developing or underdeveloped nations as a consequence of this tariff war?
6. Should there be a redefinition of the parameters deemed acceptable for using “national security” to implement tariffs?

#balancethescales



VIII. Further Reading

- How can the existing treaties be updated to address modern challenges like private sector activities, resource mining, and orbital overcrowding?
- Should there be an international body to oversee space activities? If so, what responsibilities and powers would it have?
- What measures can be introduced to prevent an arms race in space?
- How can transparency and confidence-building measures between nations reduce the risks associated with military uses of space?
- What steps can be taken to ensure that developing nations have access to space technologies and resources?
- How can international organizations support capacity-building in space exploration for countries with limited resources?
- What global strategies can be implemented to manage space debris and ensure the sustainability of space activities?

#balancethescales



- How can collaboration between governments and private companies be regulated to promote innovation while maintaining accountability and fairness?

#balancethescales