NHSMUN

National High School Model United Nations

DISEC **BACKGROUND GUIDE** | 53

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Committee History

The Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) was established in 1945. At the time, the newly convened General Assembly adopted its rules of procedure and formed its six main committees.[1] The committee was created to discuss topics related to the promotion of international peace. With this purpose, the committee should focus on issues such as disarmament and regional conflicts that pose a threat to international security. It should promote cooperation in the interest of strengthening the stability of volatile conflicts. Issues requiring coercive action, such as military involvement or the creation of new international legislation, are typically passed up to the Security Council. Over time, DISEC's mandate has changed very little due to its tendency to set long-term goals that are often recycled from committee session to committee session. For example, DISEC has never been able to create legally binding resolutions.

There are no restrictions on DISEC membership. All 193 United Nations member states are entitled to participate in the committee. The rules of procedure for DISEC include a three-stage structure that is followed for the sessions: general debate, thematic discussions, and action on draft resolutions.[2] As a part of the General Assembly, DISEC must also have verbatim reporting. Verbatim reporting is an official, word-for-word record of a committee session, which is translated into the six languages of the United Nations.[3] DISEC has played a pivotal role in discussions regarding the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which nurtured international norms against nuclear weapons proliferation. DISEC has also been fundamental in raising global awareness about the dangers of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the importance of disarmament.

DISEC is one of the main committees of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), which serves as a deliberative body for member states to discuss and negotiate disarmament and international security issues. Although it lacks legislative power, its resolutions and recommendations carry significant weight in shaping global norms and policies. In the past, DISEC has collaborated with many entities, such as the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), regional organizations such as the African Union, and various other civil society groups to promote disarmament. These partnerships are essential for enhancing the effectiveness of disarmament initiatives and addressing global security challenges.

Since 1945, DISEC's commitment to disarmament through transnational cooperation has produced real gains in international security. Its work on nuclear disarmament helped build momentum toward the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), adopted by the General Assembly in 1996. Though the treaty has not yet entered into force, since not all 44 required states have ratified it, it bars all signatories from conducting nuclear explosions and uses monitoring technology to track states' nuclear activity – increasing transparency and building trust between governments.[4] DISEC's primary goal is to ensure global security and peace. In their arguments, delegates should be sure to emphasize this goal while also prioritizing equal representation for all members of the committee.

1 "DISEC: Disarmament & International Security Committee: Imuna: NHSMUN: Model UN," IMUNA, accessed September 19, 2024, https://imuna.org/nhsmun/nyc/committees/disec-disarmament-international-security-committee/.
2 "United Nations, Main Body, Main Organs, General Assembly," United Nations, accessed September 21, 2024, https://www.un.org/en/ga/first/.
3 "Verbatim Reporting | Department for General Assembly and Conference Management," United Nations, accessed September 21, 2024, https://www.un.org/dgacm/en/content/verbatim-reporting.
4 "The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)." CTBTO. Accessed September 20, 2024. https://www.ctbto.org/our-mission/the-treaty.

TOPIC A

Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons

DISEC | NHSMUN 2027

Photo Credit: IDF

Introduction

Small arms and light weapons are common weapons used in crime and conflict. Under the UN definition, small arms are made for individual use. They include pistols, revolvers, rifles, carbines, submachine guns, assault rifles, and light machine guns. Light weapons are usually used by small groups and include heavy machine guns, portable grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft and anti-tank systems, and mortars below 100 millimeters.[1] Since these weapons are portable and durable, they can be used for many years. They may also move between governments, civilians, criminal groups, and armed organizations long after their first sale or transfer.[2]

The production and transfer of small arms and light weapons are not always illegal. States use them for defense and law enforcement. Some countries' laws may also allow civilian ownership. The problem begins when legal weapons enter illicit, or illegal, markets.[3] The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has found that many weapons are first taken from a country's legal possession before they are trafficked at home or across borders.[4] Weapons may enter illicit markets through theft, loss, illegal sales, or weak storage. This link between legal and illicit markets makes the issue hard to control.

The illicit spread of these weapons worsens conflict, strengthens criminal groups, and weakens state authority.[5] The UN has linked illicit small arms to terrorism, displacement, gender-based violence, humanitarian crises, and weakened state authority. This is especially true in countries affected by conflict, corruption, or weak law enforcement.[6]

The global supply size makes the problem even harder. The Small Arms Survey estimated that about one billion firearms were in circulation in 2017. Around 85 percent, or 857 million, were held by civilians. Military forces held about 133 million, while law-enforcement agencies held about 23 million.[7] Such a large supply creates more chances for theft and unlawful sale. Poor records, weak markings, unsafe storage, and limited tracing can also make it difficult to find where an illicit weapon came from.[8]

The international community has made several agreements to address illicit small arms trafficking. This includes the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, the Firearms Protocol, the International Tracing Instrument, and the Arms Trade Treaty.[9] Together, these instruments promote more national controls, marking and tracing, secure stockpiles, border cooperation, and measures to prevent diversion.

Despite these agreements, many gaps remain. The Fourth UN Review Conference found continued problems with marking, tracing, stockpile security, border controls, and diversion prevention. New technologies also create new risks. Polymer weapons, modular parts, and 3D printing of weapons can make marking and tracing more difficult.[10] Ammunition is another concern because controls and tracing systems are often less developed than those for firearms.[11]

DISEC must consider how to close these gaps while respecting national laws and security needs. Key questions include how to prevent diversion, secure stockpiles, improve border cooperation, strengthen marking and tracing, regulate brokers and weapon components, respond to new manufacturing techniques, and control illicit ammunition flows. Effective action will require cooperation among states that produce, export, transport, or receive these weapons.

History and Description of the Issue

CURRENT INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND IMPLEMENTATION GAPS

The United Nations has been working to end the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW) for more than twenty years. SALW include pistols, rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers, and other weapons that can be carried by one person or a small group.[12] Because these weapons are durable and easily transported, legally manufactured weapons may later be stolen, captured, resold, or trafficked into illicit markets.[13]

The main UN framework on this issue is the 2001 United Nations Programme of Action, also known as the UNPoA. Its full title is the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. The UNPoA was adopted after the 2001 UN Conference on the illicit trade in SALW. It asks states to strengthen national laws, control SALW's production and transfer, improve stockpile management, mark weapons, keep records, trace illicit weapons, cooperate with other states, and report on national progress.[14] The UNPoA is vital because it is the broadest UN framework on the illicit small arms trade.[15]

However, the UNPoA's main weakness is that it is not legally binding. Its success depends on national laws, funding, government agencies, and cooperation between states. Some states have strong marking systems, national points of contact, and regular reports. Others lack the laws, databases, trained personnel, secure storage, or funding needed for implementation.[16] This uneven progress is one reason the illicit SALW trade continues.[17]

The International Tracing Instrument, or ITI, was adopted in 2005 to support the UNPoA. It helps states find and trace illicit SALW "in a timely and reliable manner."[18] Tracing shows where a weapon comes from and how it moves. If a weapon is found at a crime scene, conflict zone, or with an armed group, tracing helps show its path. It may reveal theft from a state stockpile, diversion from a legal transfer, or a broader trafficking route.

Tracing only works when weapons are marked

Illicit guns that were intercepted as they were being smuggled

Credit: US Navy

and records are accurate. If markings are missing, damaged, or easy to remove, a weapon is hard to identify. If records are incomplete or only kept on paper, authorities may not know where the weapon came from. If states do not answer tracing requests, the investigation halts.[19] The ITI gives states a system, but that system still depends on accurate records, technical capacity, and international cooperation.[20]

Other agreements address different parts of the issue. The Firearms Protocol is linked to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. It treats illicit manufacturing and trafficking as criminal offenses. It asks states to criminalize illicit manufacturing and trafficking, improve marking and recordkeeping, and cooperate in investigations.[21] This effort is important because illicit firearms are often tied to organized crime, smuggling, corruption, and cross-border trafficking.[22]

The Arms Trade Treaty, or ATT, was adopted in 2013. It focuses on international transfers of arms, including SALW. It requires states to assess the risks of an arms transfer before approving it. These risks include diversion, violations of international human rights law, and support for transnational organized crime. This is important because many illicit weapons do not start as illegal weapons. They may start in the legal arms trade and become illicit later when controls fail.[23]

Taken together, these frameworks show that illicit SALW trade cannot be treated only as a disarmament issue. It also affects law enforcement, border security, human rights, and governance.[24] At the same time, the frameworks do not create one unified system. Some are voluntary, while legally binding instruments apply only to their states parties. As a result, implementation remains uneven.[25] States may support the same goal, but they also have different duties and levels of capacity.[26]

Recent UN action shows that the issue is still active. At the Fourth Review Conference of the UNPoA in 2024, member states called for stronger implementation of both the UNPoA and the ITI through national reporting, international aid, stockpile management, marking, tracing, gender-responsive small arms control, and new developments in weapons design and production.[27] The General Assembly then adopted Resolution 79/40. This resolution continued the UNPoA's work and supported the Ninth Biennial Meeting of States, known as BMS9.[28]

BMS9 happened in June 2026, and BMS10 will happen in 2028. Its purpose was to review challenges and opportunities in implementing the UNPoA and ITI at the national, regional, and global levels.[29] At the end of the meeting, states adopted an outcome document calling for stronger controls throughout a weapon's life. These controls included end-user checks, marking, recordkeeping, tracing, stockpile security, border cooperation, and investigations into diverted weapons. It also addressed new challenges caused by polymer weapons, modular designs, and 3D-printed firearms.[30] The first Open-Ended Technical Expert Group also met during BMS9 and discussed digital records, marking technologies, polymer and modular weapons, 3D printing, and technical assistance.[31]

New technology is also part of the debate. The 2026 Open-Ended Technical Expert Group was created to discuss how changes in weapons design and production affect the UNPoA and ITI. These changes include polymer weapons, modular weapons, and firearms made through 3D printing.[32] These weapons and parts can make marking, tracing, detection, and regulation more difficult. Because of this, states must respond to both older trafficking routes and newer production methods.[33]

Overall, the main challenge is that the illicit SALW trade crosses borders, while enforcement happens within countries. A weapon may pass through several legal jurisdictions before diversion, making its illicit movement difficult to detect and investigate. To combat this, a 2026 UN Institute for Disarmament Research report

shows the value of state reporting under the ATT, Firearms Protocol, and UNPoA.[34] These reports can help identify risks and improve implementation. The challenge is not only whether frameworks exist, but whether states can apply them sustainably.

DIVERSION FROM LEGAL MARKETS AND STATE STOCKPILES

One of the most common ways SALW enters illicit markets is through diversion. This occurs when legally produced or transferred weapons end up with unauthorized users. To stop illicit trade, states must address criminal smuggling and hold their legal systems accountable.[35] Preventing illicit trade therefore requires states to address both criminal smuggling and weaknesses in legal supply chains.

Legal arms transfers may be a source of illicit weapons when states do not verify the final buyer or user before approving a transfer. If the user is false or weapons are redirected, legally exported firearms can be diverted to unauthorized owners. This is why end-use and end-user controls matter. These controls verify who will receive exported weapons and how the weapons will be used. Under the ATT, states should assess whether exported weapons could be diverted before approving a transfer.[36] These controls can include end-user certificates, delivery checks, limits on re-exporting, and post-delivery monitoring.[37]

These controls are useful, but they can fail. Documents can be forged and inspections can be weak. States may not have enough money or staff to track weapons after delivery. Without enforcement and follow-up investigations, these measures cannot reliably prevent diversion.[38] State stockpiles are another major source of diverted weapons. Governments store large amounts of SALW, bullets, parts, and other weapon pieces in stockpiles. These weapons are used by militaries, police, border agencies, and other security services. However, incomplete records, unsafe storage, limited inspections, and failure to destroy surplus weapons can lead to loss or theft.[39] This risk is especially high during armed conflict or political instability. Armed groups may attack or loot government stockpiles when state security becomes weak, as occurred in Libya.[40] Since SALW are long-lasting, moveable, and easy to hide, they can circulate unregulated for years.[41]

A legal gun shop in the United States

Credit: adrigu

Weapons and ammunition management prevents diversion. States should know what weapons they have, where they are stored, and who can access them. To encourage this, the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs created the Modular Small-Arms Control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC). MOSAIC is a framework that guides states on small-arms control.[42] It lists marking, recordkeeping, tracing, inventory checks, physical security, and destruction of surplus weapons as key tools for small arms control.[43] Without clear records and safe storage, a state may not know that weapons have been diverted.[44]

Diversion is especially serious in areas affected by conflict, weak government control, terrorism, gang violence, or organized crime. In these areas, weapons may be stolen from government forces, police stations, and stockpiles, or even moved across weak borders. Corruption also allows weapons to move from lawful stockpiles to illicit markets. The 2025 Secretary-General's report on SALW noted that diversion continues to help armed groups and terrorist organizations in conflict-affected regions.[45] This makes diversion a global security problem, not only a domestic one.

New technology can help states prevent diversion, but also create new problems. Digital records, electronic seals, tracking systems, document verification, and data analysis can help states monitor weapons and suspicious movement. UNIDIR's 2024 report on diversion technology explains that these tools can improve control across the weapons life cycle.[46] This includes transfer, storage, and recovery. However, these systems need money, training, upkeep, cybersecurity, and cooperation between agencies. States with fewer resources may struggle to update their practices, and thus contribute to more unregulated LAWS.[47]

Diversion matters because it shows where legal weapons become illicit. Once weapons reach armed groups, gangs, traffickers, or terrorist groups, enforcement becomes much harder. Prevention must focus on earlier points where control can break down, including export approval, transport, storage, retransfer, and destruction. Stronger controls at these points can help close the gap between international frameworks and real-world enforcement.[48]

SALW TRAFFICKING AND ORGANIZED CRIME

Illicit SALW are not only used in armed conflicts. They also help organized criminal groups gain power. Firearms help these groups protect profits, control territory, threaten rivals, and resist law enforcement.[49] The UNODC notes that firearms trafficking can fuel conflict, increase violence, enrich criminal groups, and overlap with corruption, money laundering, and obstruction of justice.[50] The same networks, smuggling routes, corrupt officials, and financial systems may be used to traffic weapons, drugs, wildlife, natural resources, and people. SALW trafficking is therefore often part of a larger criminal system.[51]

The drug trade is one example. Drug trafficking groups use firearms to protect shipments, guard routes, threaten rivals, and control local markets.[52] In communities with weak law enforcement, these weapons also help criminal groups recruit, exploit, and intimidate vulnerable people.[53] These groups also adapt to changing global events. More recent UNODC reporting shows that drug traffickers continue to exploit global instability, new technology, and changing trade routes.[54] Firearms make these markets harder to police because armed groups can intimidate communities and challenge state authority. This creates a cycle: drugs generate money, money buys weapons, and weapons protect the drug trade.[55]

Illicit firearms also support wildlife crime.[56] SALW allows trafficking groups to intimidate park rangers, local communities, and law enforcement while protecting illicit goods moving through remote areas. UNODC's 2024 World Wildlife Crime Report found that wildlife trafficking affected 162 countries and about 4,000 plant and animal species between 2015 and 2021.[57]

These crimes may overlap with weapons and drug trafficking by using the same routes, corrupt officials, and money-laundering networks.[58]

Environmental crime includes illegal logging, mining, wildlife trafficking, and trade of hazardous waste. These activities are often linked to other forms of organized crime.[59] SALW facilitates these crimes because armed groups may use weapons to intimidate local communities, protect illegal mining or logging sites, threaten workers, and resist law enforcement. Together, these crimes can harm local communities, fund organized crime, and weaken state control in rural areas.[60] Human trafficking is another serious organized crime connected to the SALW trade.[61] Armed groups can use weapons to control victims, threaten families, protect routes, and prevent people from escaping.

The link between organized crime and the illicit SALW trade shows that SALW trafficking cannot be addressed through weapons control alone. Stronger border checks, firearm marking, tracing systems and customs cooperation can help reduce illicit weapons flows.[62] However, states also need financial investigations, anti-corruption measures, and cooperation among police, customs officials, regulators, and prosecutors.[63] The goal is not only to seize weapons, but also to weaken the networks that move weapons, money, people, drugs, wildlife, and natural resources across borders.[64]

CIVILIAN INSECURITY AND THE WEAKENING OF STATE AUTHORITY

Illicit SALW's impacts are often felt most directly by civilians. When criminal groups have easy access to firearms, everyday violence can become more deadly and harder to stop. Armed groups may use weapons to threaten communities, collect extortion, control movement, and punish people who resist their control.[65] Civilians may face forced recruitment, forced labor, sexual violence, displacement, and limits on daily life.[66] They may avoid school, work, markets, roads, or public spaces because of fear. They may also avoid reporting crimes because they do not believe police or courts can protect them. This fear allows criminal groups to keep control over communities.

This issue weakens state authority. In some areas, armed groups begin to act like local rulers. They may collect illegal taxes, control checkpoints, or punish people who refuse to cooperate.[67] In parts of Mexico, for example, criminal organizations have established illegal checkpoints, collected extortion payments from businesses and public transportation operators, and threatened or killed people who refused to cooperate.[68] This violence can close schools and businesses, restrict travel, weaken local economies, and obstruct public services. The government may struggle to provide security, justice, education, healthcare, and other basic services. Thus, SALW trafficking is not only a security use, but also linked to human rights, development, and public safety.

The spread of illicit firearms also affects law enforcement and public trust. Police, customs officers, park rangers, judges, and local officials may face threats from armed criminal groups.[69] Corruption can make the problem worse,

Thus, SALW trafficking is not only a security use, but also linked to human rights, development, and public safety

especially when firearms trafficking overlaps with money laundering and other forms of organized crime.[70] In the Americas, organized crime accounted for about 50 percent of homicides in 2021, and firearms were used in roughly 75 percent of homicides in the region.[71] Recent data from the 2025 Global Organized Crime Index also show that state-embedded criminal actors remain the most widespread criminal actor type globally, increasing from 5.76 to 6.04 out of 10 between 2021 and 2025.[72] This means corruption is not only a background issue; officials may help protect illicit markets, block investigations, or allow firearms and other illegal goods to move through ports and borders. When communities believe officials cannot protect them, or may even be working with criminal groups, they may be less likely to help investigations or report abuse.

Public trust is important because civilians often have information that law enforcement needs. However, they are unlikely to share this information if they fear getting hurt. This creates a dangerous cycle where armed groups spread fear, fear reduces public cooperation, and less cooperation makes law enforcement weaker.[73] Illicit SALW thus increase civilian insecurity by giving armed groups the power to threaten people, control territory, and weaken the state.[74]

Current Status

GHOST GUNS, PRIVATELY MADE FIREARMS, AND NEW MANUFACTURING TECHNOLOGY

The global impact of illicit SALW has continued to increase. The UN Secretary-General reported that small arms caused at least 48,000 conflict-related civilian deaths in 2024, a 40 percent increase from 2023.[75] The report also found that weak stockpile security, cross-border trafficking networks, and the growing availability of craft-made weapons continue to help armed groups and criminal organizations acquire weapons.

Since the Programme of Action (PoA) and the International Tracing Instrument (ITI) were adopted, advances in firearm manufacturing have created new arms-control challenges.[76] These include polymer components, modular weapon designs, computer numerical control (CNC) machining, and three-dimensional (3D) printing.[77] These technologies have created challenges for arms control rules. They have created additional pathways for firearms to enter illicit circulation. However, they also offer new chances to strengthen tracing and diversion prevention.[78]

The Biennial Meetings of States (BMS) review the overall implementation of the UNPoA and ITI. Beginning in 2026, these meetings include the Open-Ended Technical Expert Group (OETEG), who focus on how new technologies affect the PoA and the ITI and develop recommendations.[79] These UN discussions use the term “privately made firearm” (PMF). This refers to a firearm made outside traditional manufacturing systems.[80] This terminology allows states to discuss new technologies without relying on national legal definitions that vary between countries.[81]

The OETEG held its first meeting from June 4–5, 2026. States and experts discussed digital records, new marking tools, polymer and modular weapons, 3D printing, and online weapon-design files.[82] They also considered whether manufacturers should identify one primary component that always carries a weapon’s main serial number. This could reduce confusion when modular parts with different markings are combined. The group did not create new international rules, but identified issues for more technical discussion before the group meets again in 2028.[83]

PMFs are not new; homemade and craft-made guns have existed for years.[84] Today, however, PMFs may be made from commercially available firearm parts or from unfinished parts. They may also be made using technologies like computer numerical control (CNC) machining and additive manufacturing. These firearms raise similar

Ghost guns can look and feel just like manufactured guns

Credit: Los Angeles Police Department

concerns because firearms may be made outside industrial supply chains and regulatory systems.[85] Advances in design software and lower-cost CNC machines have allowed this issue to grow in recent years. These new advances have prompted governments to consider how existing international agreements should apply to these new types of production.[86]

Despite the rise of PMFs, most illicit firearms recovered worldwide were first made legally before entering unlawful markets. However, PMFs must be addressed because they create new challenges for existing regulatory and tracing systems.[87] The old systems for marking, recordkeeping, and tracing were built around licensed production. States must now determine how these systems should apply to firearms manufactured outside traditional regulatory systems. If a PMF is never marked or logged, police may have little information available when attempting to trace it.[88]

Technological developments have also raised new questions about firearm identification.[89] Guns built with swappable parts can be harder to trace because marked components may be replaced or combined with parts carrying different serial numbers. Polymer, or plastic, components create another problem because traditional metal-stamping methods may damage the material, while markings placed directly on plastic may be easier to remove or harder to recover. Manufacturers may therefore need to use methods such as laser engraving or permanent metal inserts.[90] These developments raise questions about whether existing marking rules preserve enough identifying information throughout a weapon's life cycle.[91]

Three-dimensional (3D) printing, also known as additive manufacturing, builds a part by adding thin layers of material from a digital file.[92] This technology has many benign uses, but policymakers have started to study what it could mean for gun making. Currently, fully printed firearms face limitations involving strength, heat, and reliability. For now, 3D printing adds to, rather than replaces, traditional sources of illicit firearms.[93]

Even so, 3D printing presents new challenges because digital design files can be copied and shared rapidly across borders.[94] However, laws

on PMFs, unfinished gun parts, and digital gun-making tools differ from one country to the next. Something strictly regulated in one country may face fewer restrictions in another, benefitting illegal actors.[95] These gaps also make it harder for states to work together across borders.[96]

Resource disparities present another challenge.[97] Many states already struggle to carry out the old PoA and ITI rules because they lack trained staff, funds, or skills. New tools may raise demands more, since they call for updated ways to investigate, stronger skills, and better information sharing between states.[98] At the same time, older tools like digital record systems, marking methods, and tracing tools can help states carry out the old rules better, if they have enough money and support.[99]

These challenges show a broader issue with arms control. Gun-making tools are changing faster than most national laws can keep up with.[100] While PMFs and new tools are unlikely to replace normal gun trafficking any time soon, they have opened up new paths through which weapons can reach illegal markets.[101] Keeping the global rules useful will depend less on writing new treaties and more on making old ones work better, building closer teamwork between states, and updating marking, recordkeeping, and tracing to match the new tools.[102]

AMMUNITION DIVERSION AND TRACING GAPS

Ammunition diversion is another problem in controlling SALW.[103] Unlike a gun, which can be used for years, ammunition must be replaced after one use. This makes ammunition a key link in armed conflict, organized crime, terrorism, and other armed violence.[104] UN research finds that poor transfer controls, illegal resales, battlefield capture, theft, and leaks from unsafe stockpiles can all move legal ammunition into the wrong hands.[105]

The problem goes beyond the moment ammunition first goes missing through diversion.[106] There is no single agreed legal definition of diversion.[107] The Arms Trade Treaty does not provide one definition of diversion. UNIDIR has noted that this absence makes it harder for states to interpret and implement their responsibilities consistently.[108] States may therefore classify incidents such as battlefield capture, unauthorized re-export, corruption, theft, or unexplained losses differently. These differences can complicate reporting, data comparison, and investigations into trafficking routes. In general, diversion describes the movement of arms or ammunition from authorized control, users, or uses to unauthorized recipients or illicit markets.[109] It may occur through theft, loss, corruption, unauthorized retransfer, battlefield capture, state collapse, or other means. Diversion happens at many points in the supply chain: manufacturing, transferring, storage, use, or disposal.[110] UN guidance therefore promotes security throughout ammunition's entire life cycle, including stock control, recordkeeping, end-use monitoring, tracing, and data-sharing.[111]

Tracing matters because finding where ammunition left lawful control can show

Gun-making tools are changing faster than most national laws can keep up with

weak spots and help stop future losses. Yet, ammunition tracing is less standardized than firearms tracing.[112] The Small Arms Survey calls ammunition tracing a fairly young field with no single accepted method. Ammunition also becomes difficult to trace once it leaves its original packaging because production markings rarely identify its buyer, intended user, or point of diversion.[113]

These gaps helped drive the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2023. The Framework built a dedicated political structure for handling conventional ammunition across its whole life cycle, covering diversion prevention, stockpile management, marking, tracing, openness, and global teamwork.[114] States held a preparatory meeting in June 2025 to begin planning how the Global Framework will be carried out, with the first full Meeting of States expected in 2027.[115]

Government stockpiles remain one of the most vulnerable points for diversion.[116] Large amounts of ammunition sit stored by armed forces, police, and customs agencies for long periods of time.[117] If guarding, inventory checks, or routine inspections fall short, ammunition may be stolen over time. It may also be removed in bulk during times of conflict.[118] Beyond outright theft, diversion can also happen through corruption, fraudulent purchases, false end-user papers, and illegal resales.[119] Transport and international transfers create additional vulnerabilities as ammunition passes among manufacturers, brokers, freight companies, customs agencies, and distributors. For this reason, recent UN guidance stresses that stopping diversion needs a full supply-chain approach. This means mixing export controls, transport security, stock control, oversight after delivery, and sharing data, rather than relying on stockpile security alone.[120]

Armed conflict also creates additional diversion risks.[121] Ammunition may be left behind during military action, seized from state depots, and captured. Once out of state hands, these stocks may spread through regional trafficking networks or get used by criminal groups across borders.[122]

Unlike firearms, ammunition is not often marked with a unique serial number on each cartridge.[123] They are instead found on cartridge headstamps, the batch or lot numbers, or the first box the ammunition was shipped in.[124] These marks help officials name the maker, caliber, year, and lot, but they do not often reveal the buyer or user.[125] Losing the first box is one of the biggest hurdles to tracing.[126] Once ammunition has left its first box or is mixed with rounds from other lots, officials may not be able to trace it.[127] Officials must therefore combine physical markings with manufacturing records, transfer documents, customs records, and stockpile inventories.[128] When these records are missing, held by different agencies, kept for only a short time, or unavailable, tracing gets harder. The International Ammunition Technical Guidelines therefore emphasize stock control and long-term recordkeeping.[129]

International tracing also relies on teamwork between states.[130] Unlike firearms, which are covered by the International Tracing Instrument, there is no legally binding global tracing tool for ammunition.[131] Gaps in how states keep records and laws may slow officials from rebuilding the full path of diversion.[132]

The International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG), finalized in 2011 and regularly updated through the UN SaferGuard Programme, provide technical standards for ammunition, including guarding, surveillance, transport, stock control, risk reduction, destroying surplus ammunition, and recordkeeping.[133] While IATG are voluntary, they have become a key reference for states seeking to improve ammunition management and prevent diversion.[134]

The UN General Assembly's adoption of the Global Framework in 2023 marked a global step in ammunition management.[135] However, many states lack modern storage facilities, funding, and technical expertise for life-cycle ammunition

management. The Framework therefore recognizes the importance of international assistance and capacity-building.[136]

New tools are helping address some of these gaps.[137] Several states have brought in digital inventory systems, barcode tools, and electronic recordkeeping to strengthen ammunition supply chains. International assistance programs also support storage upgrades, stockpile inspections, staff training, and surplus destruction.[138] While these steps can reduce diversion, they require steady funding and long-term technical capacity that are not available in every country.[139]

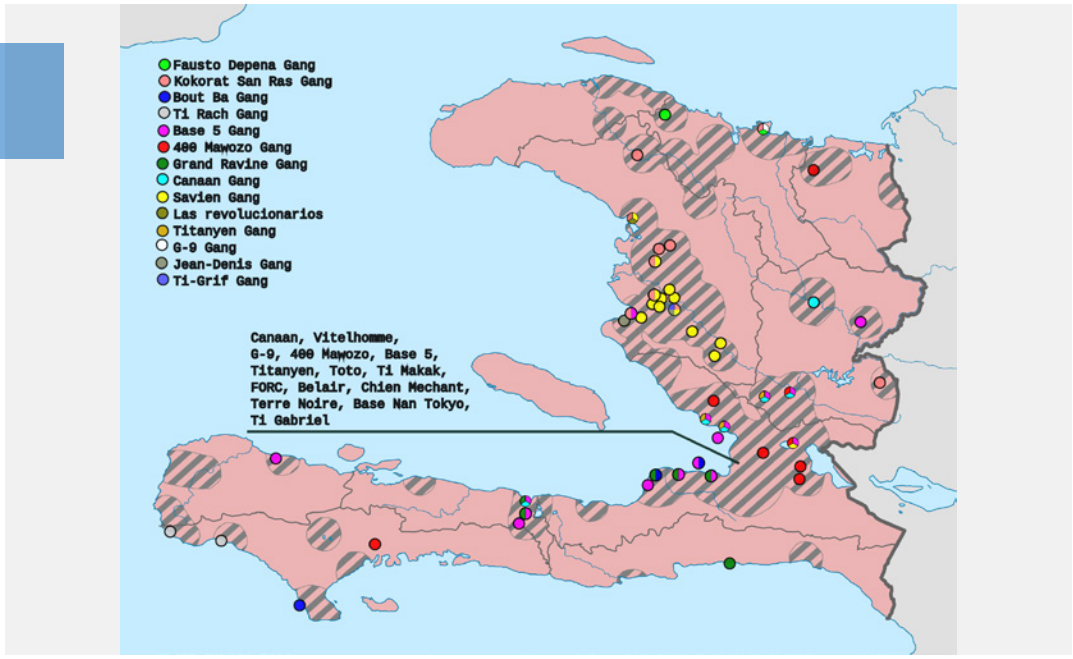
As illegal trafficking networks adapt, stopping ammunition diversion will need more than stronger storage sites alone. Recent initiatives have strengthened international guidance, but unequal national capacity continues to limit implementation.[140]

CASE STUDY: FIREARMS TRAFFICKING AND GANG VIOLENCE IN HAITI

In Haiti, the human cost of steady firearms trafficking reaches past the direct harm of armed violence. As gangs with LAWS have spread into new areas, they have driven out communities, broken transport networks, blocked aid access, and weakened basic public services.[141] Recent UN reports found that between January 2025 and March 2026, at least 5,519 people were killed and 2,608 were hurt as violence grew across Haiti. More than 1.4 million people were displaced.[142] Armed groups also target schools and health centers, aid convoys, and key infrastructure. Illegal firearms have also fueled widespread kidnappings, sexual violence, extortion, and human trafficking.[143]

Illegal firearms trafficking in Haiti undermines public safety. This happens because weapons flow into a country with weak border controls, state institutions, and policing.[144] Haiti has almost no firearms-manufacturing industry of its own. This means most weapons found with criminal groups were first made abroad before being trafficked into the country. The case demonstrates how external weapons supplies can intensify an existing domestic security crisis. Rather, a steady supply of weapons can reshape the balance of power between governments and organized crime groups, making trafficking a driver of instability and violence.[145]

Instead of moving through one route, firearms enter Haiti through global supply chains that



The shaded areas on the map show regions of gang activity

Credit: Clyde H. Mapping

exploit weak controls. Many firearms found in Haiti come from the United States. Traffickers often hide firearms, ammunition, and gun parts inside shipping containers carrying legal goods. Haiti's long coastline, many ports, and weak sea patrol also facilitate trafficking.[146] Once inside Haiti, firearms move through criminal networks that also carry drugs, fuel, migrants, and other illegal goods.[147]

Although cross-border trafficking supplies many of the firearms used by Haitian gangs, UN investigations have found that criminal groups have also gained weapons through attacks on police stations, theft from state armories, corrupt customs and police officials, and gaps in national firearms systems.[148] Coordinated attacks on police facilities have further increased the risk that weapons intended for state forces will be captured and reused.[149] These findings show that border enforcement must be combined with secure stockpile management, full recordkeeping, working tracing systems, and steps to stop diversion across a gun's whole life, even after it enters the country.[150]

The growing supply of diverted firearms has increased the power of Haiti's armed gangs. Recent UN reports find that criminal groups now hold military-style rifles and large stores of ammunition that outgun Haiti's police units and prisons. With these weapons, Haitian gangs have moved past normal crime to set up checkpoints, extort businesses, collect illegal taxes, and control key transport routes.[151]

In July 2025, the head of UNODC told the UN Security Council that criminal groups held sway over about 90 percent of Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital and largest city. The report also noted that the line between local gangs and cross-border trafficking networks has grown more blurred as criminal groups build stronger ties across borders. This shows that steady access to illegal firearms does not just raise levels of armed violence.[152] It can also let organized crime groups wear down state authority and grow illegal economies.[153]

International action has shown that reducing violence in Haiti also requires stopping the flow of illegal weapons into the country.[154] In October 2022, the UN Security Council created a system of sanctions that included an arms embargo against designated gang leaders and their supporters.[155] In October 2023, the Council expanded the embargo to prohibit weapons and ammunition from being supplied to non-state groups involved in gang violence, criminal activity, or human rights abuses.[156] In July 2024, it also called on states to inspect suspicious shipments going to Haiti and share information about trafficking routes and supply chains.[157] The embargo was expanded again in October 2024 to cover all types of weapons, ammunition, military equipment, spare parts, and related assistance.[158] These measures were most recently renewed in October 2025.[159] UNODC has also called for stronger border and customs controls, better investigations, and greater cooperation between Haiti and the countries where trafficked weapons originate. These efforts are important because an arms embargo cannot succeed unless states have the institutions and resources needed to enforce it.[160]

In July 2025, the head of UNODC told the UN Security Council that criminal groups held sway over about 90 percent of Port-au-Prince

Overall, Haiti shows that combatting illicit SALW trafficking requires action across a firearm's entire life cycle. Export, transit, and destination states each play a part in stopping diversion, strengthening tracing and data-sharing tools, improving stockpile security.[161]

Bloc Analysis

POINTS OF DIVISION

The illicit trade of SALW fuels conflict, terrorism, organized crime, and human rights abuses around the world. UN officials have called it a chain of violence, keeping regions unstable and forcing people from their homes.[162] Though the UN has created frameworks like the UNPoA and the ITI to fight this problem, their implementation is uneven.[163] Every country has a different relationship to this trade: some experience armed conflict fueled by illicit weapons, while others struggle with organized crime and cartel violence. Moreover, some countries produce and export firearms, while others serve as source, transit, or destination points along trafficking routes.

These different relationships create disagreements about where international action should focus. Conflict-affected states may prioritize disarmament, stockpile security, and assistance for restoring state control. States affected by organized crime may emphasize customs enforcement, criminal investigations, and cooperation with source and transit countries. Major producers and exporters may support measures that prevent diversion but resist policies that could restrict lawful arms production, national defense, or legitimate international transfers.

States disagree about who should carry the most responsibility for stopping illicit arms trafficking. Some want producing and exporting states to use stronger end-user checks and post-delivery monitoring. Others argue that destination states must strengthen their own borders, stockpiles, records, and law-enforcement institutions. States also disagree about whether to create stronger international standards or focus on carrying out current frameworks like the UNPoA and ITI.[164]

New technology creates another division. Some states support stronger rules for privately made firearms, weapon parts, polymer and modular weapons, and digital design files. Others worry that these rules could interfere with domestic laws or lawful manufacturing. Countries also disagree about who should fund the technology, training, storage, and databases needed to carry out stronger controls.[165]

These blocs may overlap. A country may experience both armed conflict and organized crime, while also producing or exporting weapons. Delegates should therefore use the blocs as broad negotiating priorities rather than fixed categories and also carefully research their country's priorities, domestic laws, and international commitments to determine which approach best reflects their national position.

CONFLICT-AFFECTED STATES PRIORITIZING DISARMAMENT AND STABILIZATION

This bloc includes countries that face serious violence tied directly to SALW used in war, armed conflict, and insurgency. These countries are often destination states for trafficked weapons, although weapons may also be diverted from domestic stockpiles, captured during conflict, or supplied directly to armed groups.[166] They deal with the direct costs of weak arms control. This includes civilian deaths, displacement, and weaker government control.[167] This bloc usually supports stronger tracing systems. It also favors stronger border security, secure state stockpiles, weapons-collection programs, and efforts to destroy surplus or recovered weapons.[168] Because many conflicts involve multiple armed groups and neighboring states, countries in this bloc generally favor stronger regional cooperation alongside domestic security reforms.

Many argue they need international assistance. These states may lack the funding, trained personnel, storage facilities, or technology needed to secure weapons and trace their movement. They may also argue that producing, exporting, and neighboring states must do more to prevent weapons from reaching conflict zones.[169]

Countries commonly associated with this bloc include Ukraine, Sudan, Mali, Myanmar, and Syria. These are countries where SALW fuel active armed conflicts and where state forces, insurgent organizations, militias, or other armed groups may capture, divert, or traffic weapons.[170] The Sahel region is another clear example. The 300 million people who live in this area face intercommunal conflict, violent extremism, and competition over scarce resources. Looted weapons from Libya have made this worse. These weapons flow south through trafficking networks.[171] Weapons may also be diverted from national stockpiles or captured from security forces during attacks.

States in this bloc may push for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs.[172] This bloc also supports weapons collection after ceasefires, stronger stockpile management, destruction of surplus weapons, and border security aimed at cutting off arms flows to armed groups. It may also seek international funding, technical assistance, and regional tracing systems that can identify where weapons entered a conflict. However, some governments in this bloc may resist intrusive monitoring, restrictions on weapons supplied to state security forces, or international measures that they believe could weaken their ability to fight insurgent groups. This creates a division between states that prioritize stronger international oversight and those that emphasize sovereignty and the security needs of national governments.[173]

ORGANIZED CRIME-AFFECTED STATES PRIORITIZING TRAFFICKING ENFORCEMENT

These are countries where SALW fuels high homicide and organized-crime violence. Typically, there is no active insurgency or interstate war in these countries. However, the distinction is not absolute: organized crime and armed conflict may overlap, and some countries may fit both this bloc and the first. Haiti is a clear example. The country does not produce many firearms domestically. Instead, military-style weapons are trafficked into the country from abroad or diverted from national stockpiles. Criminal organizations use these weapons to control territory, intimidate civilians, challenge law enforcement, and protect trafficking routes.[174] Unlike conflict-affected states, violence in this bloc is usually driven primarily by criminal groups seeking profit rather than political or ideological objectives.

Countries commonly associated with this bloc include Haiti, Mexico, Ecuador, Jamaica, and Colombia. However, Colombia and Haiti may also share characteristics with the conflict-affected bloc because criminal violence can overlap with armed political groups and severe challenges to state authority. In the case of Haiti, weapons typically come from the United States, through maritime shipments, commercial cargo, and regional trafficking routes that may involve other Caribbean states. This has fueled a documented surge in gang violence since 2021.[175] The Small Arms Survey tracks firearm homicide rates worldwide through its Global Violent Deaths database.[176] Its 2023 data recorded firearm homicide rates of 41.9 deaths per 100,000 people in Jamaica and 39.5 in Ecuador. Mexico followed at 17.2.[177] As a result, these countries usually prioritize stronger policing and judicial capacity, customs enforcement, firearm marking and tracing, and measures to remove illicit weapons from criminal networks. They also tend to support greater regional intelligence sharing and efforts to disrupt trafficking networks before firearms reach criminal groups. Rather than emphasizing

post-conflict disarmament programs, these states generally focus on preventing diversion from legal markets, improving investigations, and reducing firearm-related violence while preserving law enforcement capabilities.

States in this bloc may ask producing and exporting countries to use stronger end-user checks, monitor weapons after delivery, inspect suspicious shipments, investigate straw purchasers and illegal brokers, and answer tracing requests. Straw purchasers are people who legally buy firearms by claiming falsely it is for themselves and then pass weapons to criminals.[178] UNIDIR also notes that end-user checks, shipment controls, and post-delivery monitoring can help stop legal weapons from being diverted.[179] These states may argue that destination countries cannot stop trafficking alone when weapons continue to arrive from legal markets abroad. However, countries in this bloc do not always agree on domestic firearms policy. Some support stronger civilian gun controls and community violence-prevention programs. Others focus more narrowly on traffickers and criminal use while protecting lawful ownership and weapons used by police.

PRODUCER AND EXPORTER STATES PRIORITIZING DIVERSION CONTROLS AND LAWFUL TRADE

This bloc includes countries with large legal arms industries that play a major role in the global weapons trade. Countries commonly associated with this bloc include the United States, France, Russia, Germany, and China. These countries do not have the same position on arms control. France, Germany, and China are parties to the Arms Trade Treaty. As of 2026, the ATT had 118 state parties.[180] Russia is not a party, while the United States signed the treaty but never ratified it.[181] Their export laws, reporting practices, and support for international agreements therefore differ. Some accept legally binding transfer standards, while others prefer national export controls and voluntary international cooperation. However, they all seek to protect lawful arms production, national defense, and legal international transfers.

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute data show the United States made up 43 percent of global major arms exports between 2020 and 2024. France came second at 9.8 percent. Russia followed at 6.8 percent, then Germany at 5.7 percent, and China at 5.6 percent. Together, the top five suppliers accounted for about 70 percent of global arms-transfer volume.[182] These figures measure major conventional weapons, such as aircraft and armored vehicles, rather than the SALW trade specifically. However, they illustrate the broader economic and security interests that shape these countries' approaches to arms-transfer regulation.

These countries draw a sharp line between legal arms production and illicit trafficking. They tend to be cautious about proposals that could restrict legal arms sales, national defense industries, or sovereignty over export licensing. While these countries differ politically, they generally seek to prevent diversion without automatically restricting legitimate arms production or lawful international transfers.

The United States made up 43 percent of global major arms exports between 2020 and 2024

States in this bloc may support stronger marking, recordkeeping, stockpile security, end-user checks, customs cooperation, and weapons tracing.[183] These measures focus on stopping legal weapons from entering illicit markets without banning lawful trade. They may also support technical assistance that helps receiving countries improve storage, records, and tracing after weapons are delivered.[184]

However, states in this bloc may resist mandatory public reporting, universal inspections after delivery, or international rules for domestic firearms. They may argue that these measures are expensive, expose sensitive information, or interfere with national authority. At the same time, forged end-user documents, weak broker controls, and limited monitoring can allow exported weapons to reach unauthorized users.[185] Delegates must therefore decide how much responsibility an exporting state should keep after its weapons are delivered.

Committee Mission

The Disarmament and International Security Committee, or DISEC, is the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly. It deals with disarmament, arms control, and threats to global peace. All UN Member States may join its debates. This gives every state a place to raise security concerns and propose a shared response.[186]

DISEC can debate problems and propose action, but it cannot enforce its decisions. The First Committee reviews draft resolutions and sends approved texts to the General Assembly for a final vote.[187] It cannot impose sanctions, approve the use of force, or order states to change national law. The UN Security Council has the main duty to respond to threats to international peace and may adopt binding measures in some cases.[188]

For this reason, DISEC must focus on action that fits its mandate. Rather than creating binding rules, the First Committee can encourage states to strengthen implementation of global agreements, improve national reporting, expand technical assistance and training, and enhance cooperation to trace illicit weapons and disrupt trafficking networks.[189] However, these measures depend on Member State cooperation rather than direct UN enforcement. Domestic firearms legislation remains under national authority, but DISEC can promote stronger marking, tracing, stockpile management, border cooperation, information-sharing, and capacity-building.

Ultimately, DISEC seeks to strengthen international peace and security by encouraging practical cooperation between Member States. Successful resolutions should build on existing international agreements, improve implementation, and remain consistent with the First Committee's advisory mandate.

TOPIC B

DISEC | NHSMUN 2027

Preventing Non-State Actors from Acquiring Advanced Weapons

Photo Credit: United States Air Force

Introduction

A non-state actor is a group that uses or threatens violence to reach a political, religious, criminal, or economic goal while operating outside the formal authority of a state. Some non-state actors nevertheless receive weapons, funding, or training from governments.[190] These groups vary in size, causes, and beliefs. Their access to increasingly advanced weapons can allow them to conduct attacks that were once possible only for states.

The term "advanced weapons" does not refer to one formally defined category under international law.[191] For the purposes of this guide, it includes weapons and supporting technologies that use advanced guidance, automation, digital systems, specialized materials, or dual-use components, meaning components that have both civilian and military applications.[192] For most of the twentieth century, advanced weapons were expensive, hard to build, and primarily controlled by highly developed states. This made it difficult for a non-state actor to acquire similar capabilities. However, that gap has been closing for years.

This shift traces back to a change in the civilian technology market. Commercial drones built for hobbyists have been repurposed for surveillance and strikes.[193] 3D printers once used for projects are now being used to make firearm parts.[194] Artificial intelligence can be used to support navigation, surveillance, target recognition, or autonomous functions in weapon systems.[195] By the 2020s, many of these commercial technologies had become cheaper and more widely available. Because many components are ordinary commercial products, traditional arms-control systems may struggle to identify or track them before they reach non-state actors.[196]

This problem affects states, civilians, and international trade. Government soldiers increasingly face non-state actors armed with weapons that were once available only to state militaries. Civilians may be harmed by chemical attacks and drone strikes, while attacks on infrastructure and commercial shipping can disrupt essential services and regional trade. States must consider how these technologies can be prevented from reaching actors that may use them unlawfully.

Early efforts to control these weapons primarily focused on states and government-controlled transfers. However, current policies do not comprehensively regulate conventional drones, autonomous weapons, cyber capabilities, or all commercially available dual-use technologies. Some states treat information about their weapons production and transfers as a matter of national security. This makes tracking specific transfers difficult. Tracking is also complicated by dual-use technologies, as these products cannot simply be banned without affecting legitimate industries. Delegates must therefore consider how states can control dangerous transfers without unnecessarily restricting lawful trade, civilian research, or technological development.

History and Description of the Issue

HISTORY OF ADVANCED WEAPONS CONTROL

Advanced weapons are not necessarily separate from conventional weapons. A conventional drone or missile, for example, may become more capable when equipped with advanced guidance, sensors, or autonomous functions. The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs defines conventional arms as all weapons that are not nuclear, chemical, or biological.[197] Advanced technology can increase a weapon's range,

accuracy, speed, or ability to operate without continuous human control.[198] Because these technologies change rapidly, control lists and enforcement systems may become outdated.[199]

The first formal effort to regulate advanced strategic technology transfers during the Cold War was the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (CoCom). This was formed in 1949 with the goal of restricting the Soviet Union's access to advanced weapons.[200] Members of this agreement included NATO allies, Japan, and Australia, among others. CoCom agreed that certain items should be restricted from being sold to Soviet-aligned countries. These items included propulsion, electronics, aeronautics equipment, and more. It continued after the Soviet Union dissolved and then formally ended in 1994.[201] CoCom was only an informal coordinating agreement and not an official treaty, and non-state actors were not its primary concern.

In 1996, the Wassenaar Arrangement was created as a voluntary export-control arrangement.[202] Participating states maintain shared control lists and exchange information about transfers and denials involving conventional arms and sensitive dual-use goods and technologies. However, each state decides whether to approve or deny an export through its own national laws. Information about previous denials can help other participants assess similar requests, but it does not require them to make the same decision. The Wassenaar Arrangement is therefore a transparency and coordination mechanism, not an international enforcement body. It has encouraged participating states to strengthen their national export controls and develop common standards. However, several major arms producers, including China, Israel, and Belarus, are not participants. Their transfers are therefore not covered by the arrangement's information-sharing system.[203] Its voluntary structure encourages coordination, but leaves enforcement to each participating state.[204] Despite these issues, Wassenaar created shared control lists and a system for exchanging information about sensitive transfers.

Other groups have also sought to limit the spread of advanced weapons. The Nuclear Suppliers Group first met in 1975 and now includes 48 participating governments.[205] This group has two sets of guidelines. The first set regulates trade of nuclear goods like reactors, enrichment equipment, and similar items. The next set of guidelines are regulated dual-use goods. Items in this category include high strength steel and specialized pumps. If a country wanted to buy controlled goods from an NSG participant, the exporting government would examine the proposed end user and purpose.[206] For nuclear-specific items, recipients generally have to promise peaceful use, accept relevant IAEA safeguards, protect the materials from theft, and follow controls on retransfer. For dual-use items, exporters also assess whether the goods could contribute to an unsafeguarded nuclear program or nuclear explosive activity.[207] Each participating government makes the final decision through its national export-control system.

The Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) was established in 1987.[208] Its 35 participating states, known as partners, coordinate national export controls intended to limit the spread of rockets and unmanned aerial vehicles that could be used to deliver weapons of mass destruction. The regime pays particular attention to systems capable of carrying a payload of at least 500 kilograms for at least 300 kilometers.[209] The regime also covers listed equipment, software, and technologies that could contribute to these systems. However, it is a voluntary political arrangement rather than a treaty. Each partner implements its Guidelines and Annex through national laws and practices. The MTCR itself has no regime-wide enforcement or verification mechanism.[210]

The MTCR Annex covers many military and dual-use items, but it does not list every commercial component that could contribute to a missile or unmanned system. It also requires members to control unlisted goods when they suspect those

goods could help build a system that delivers weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).[211] Still, common commercial components may fall outside the regime's technical requirements or appear harmless when purchased separately. Since the MTCR relies on national export laws and enforcement, buyers may attempt to evade controls by purchasing components separately, using intermediaries, or obtaining items from countries that do not apply the MTCR Guidelines. These components may then be assembled into more capable missile or drone systems.

Additionally, the United Nations has made considerable efforts to prevent non-state actors from acquiring the most dangerous categories of weapons. UN Security Council Resolution 1540 was adopted unanimously in April 2004.[212] It was the first international measure requiring all states to prevent non-state actors from acquiring nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons and the systems used to deliver them. It requires all member states to pass and enforce laws prohibiting non-state actors from developing, acquiring, manufacturing, possessing, transporting, transferring, or using nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. All UN member states must follow this resolution. This is possible because it was adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.[213]

To comply, states were legally required to establish domestic controls, including measures to account for and secure related materials, border controls to stop illegal transfers, export and transshipment controls, and law-enforcement measures. States were also called upon to submit reports to the 1540 Committee on the steps they had taken or planned to take.[214]

Resolution 1540 was a step forward. However, it focuses on WMDs and does not comprehensively regulate conventional drones, autonomous weapons, cyber capabilities, or every dual-use technology that non-state actors may exploit. It therefore does not provide a complete framework for the conventional and commercially derived technologies examined in this guide.[215]

THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF DUAL-USE TECHNOLOGY

Dual-use technology refers to a product or technology that has both civilian and military applications.[216] Many common products may be considered dual-use, depending on how they are designed or employed. For example, a GPS chip could help a car navigate, but that same technology could be used to guide missiles to a target. Governments have managed the tension between civilian and military use for decades, but changes to technology accessibility threaten this balance.

For most of the twentieth century, many sensitive dual-use products were expensive and hard to transport. Their cost and complexity often limited access to states and large industries. Export controls often worked because items were specific, traceable, and hard to copy. Over time, increased production and lower consumer costs of advanced technology changed this, making dual-use technology accessible to non-state actors. These groups now have easier access to some technologies that were once

Buyers may attempt to evade controls by purchasing components separately, using intermediaries, or obtaining items from countries that do not apply the MTCR

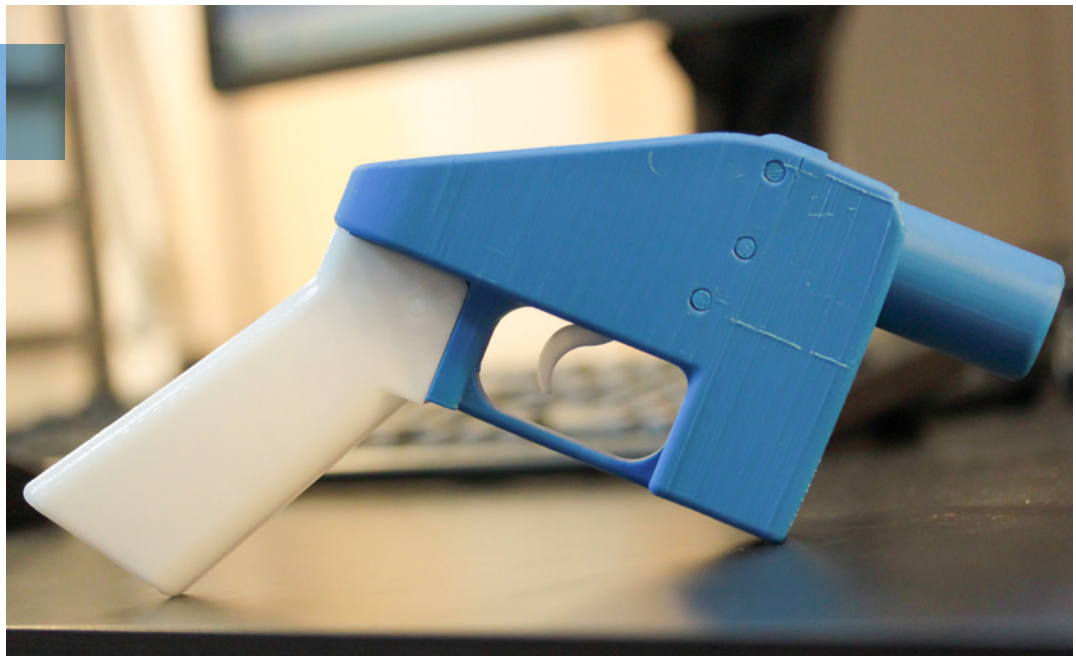
largely limited to states, including drones and advanced communications systems.[217] For example, ACLED found that 469 non-state armed groups had deployed drones in attacks at least once between 2020 and 2025. Of these groups, 58 used drones for the first time in 2025.[218] This growth allows some groups to conduct surveillance and attacks from greater distances, increasing the threat they can pose to governments and civilians.

The civilian market for high-technology products grew starting in the 1970s. Consumer electronics, commercial aircraft components, and industrial computer systems became very sophisticated. This allowed some civilian products to be adapted for military purposes.[219] By 1990, 17 of the 20 technologies the United States named as critical to national security were also widely used in civilian markets. This overlap made it harder for export-control systems to separate harmless commercial sales from transfers that could support weapons development.[220]

This overlap between civilian and military uses extends beyond ordinary consumer electronics. A supercomputer sold for weather forecasting can also contribute to missile targeting.[221] In the past, India has used satellite programs built for civilian space use that can also be used to support ballistic missiles. Pakistan has used civilian energy programs to build nuclear weapons.[222] The same problem now appears in commercial drones, computing systems, sensors, and navigation equipment. Currently, drones built for hobby flying have been adapted for frontline combat in Ukraine, with nearly two million drones used in combat in 2024.[223]

Drones are commonly modified by non-state actors to become weapons. Their price and range vary, but even relatively inexpensive systems can carry cameras or small explosive devices. This allows non-state actors to conduct surveillance or deliver explosive payloads using systems that may initially appear civilian. The commercial availability that makes drones cheap and easy to buy also makes them difficult to trace. A 2024 investigation into unidentified drones near sensitive sites in Germany demonstrated how difficult it can be to determine who operates a commercial drone and whether it is being used for recreation, surveillance, or attack planning. Although that incident was not attributed to a non-state actor, this uncertainty illustrates a broader enforcement challenge.[224]

Another prominent civilian technology adapted



Example of a 3D-printed weapon

Credit: Vvzvlad

for military purposes is 3D printing. A consumer-grade 3D printer can produce some functional firearm components.[225] Because 3D printers are widely available, and design files can be shared online, firearms or weapon components may be printed privately without government authorities being notified.[226] Privately manufactured firearms may lack standard markings or records, making tracing more difficult.

A 2024 United Nations Security Council report reported that Al-Shabaab, an Al-Qaeda affiliate based in Somalia, was experimenting with 3D printing to manufacture components used to adapt commercial drones. The report also warned that digital files could allow terrorist groups to print components for improvised explosive devices or weaponized drones.[227] Pro-ISIS groups have also shared manuals for partially 3D-printed firearms on encrypted platforms. This could provide another way for non-state actors to acquire weapons or components, particularly where access to conventional firearms is restricted.[228]

Dual-use technologies also create risks related to chemical weapons. In the 1990s, Aum Shinrikyo was a rising terrorist organization in Japan.[229] In 1994, the group used sarin nerve agent in an attack in Matsumoto, Japan, killing eight people. In 1995, it carried out another sarin attack on the Tokyo subway, killing 14 people and injuring thousands. The group was able to gain scientific knowledge, laboratory equipment, and chemicals through organizations that appeared to be legitimate. Some of these materials were normally used for peaceful or civilian purposes but were instead used to create chemical weapons. This example shows that simply controlling official chemical weapons is not enough to stop non-state groups from using legal, commercially available materials for harmful purposes.[230]

International controls can also create disagreements over sovereignty, inspections, and access to sensitive facilities. Governments may worry that foreign inspectors could learn important information about their military programs during inspections. Because of this, some countries may limit or oppose inspections they believe could reveal national-security information. Even when inspection agreements have strict rules, disagreements can still happen over which facilities inspectors can enter, what equipment they can examine, and whether limited access makes it possible to confirm that

Military personnel preparing chemical decontamination equipment

Credit: Japan Ground Self-Defense Force

a country is following the rules. Further, because dual-use technologies can have both civilian and military purposes and may be modified after an inspection, their regulation is much harder. Limiting access may help protect sensitive national information, but it also makes it harder for international organizations to identify or confirm possible violations.[231]

Dual-use technology may not be a physical weapon, but also may instead take the form of software. AI software may be copied, modified, or transferred electronically.[232] This makes conventional inspections less effective. The same algorithm that powers a navigation system could be adapted to guide a drone strike. However, advanced chips, sensors, computing equipment, and other hardware used to operate AI-enabled systems remain physical products that states may attempt to regulate.

Non-state actors have increasingly used drones with automated navigation, target-tracking, or preprogrammed flight functions. The Houthis, a non-state actor group based in Yemen, have allegedly used AI-enabled drones to strike oil tankers and airport buildings in the United Arab Emirates.[233] In West Africa, an Al-Qaeda affiliate has allegedly conducted at least 67 AI-enabled drones strikes since 2023.[234] This technology was acquired commercially, proving that groups with limited resources can still create chaos with dual-use technologies.

While previous security agreements may have worked in the past, the commercialization of dual-use technologies has created massive loopholes. Past solutions have helped to prevent the spread of weapons that are expensive and traceable. However, dual-use technology is cheap and easy to access, creating an entirely new problem. Delegates must determine whether existing frameworks can be updated or whether new international standards are required.

ACQUISITION METHODS AND TYPES OF ADVANCED WEAPONS

The spread or misuse of advanced weapons can intensify conflicts and increase insecurity across national borders.[235] Each weapon type is acquired differently. Some non-state actors receive weapons from governments that support their cause.[236] Others gain access to weapons left behind in conflict zones. Others buy what they need through open commercial markets.[237] Groups may also receive digital designs, training, and technical expertise through international networks. Each pathway works for different reasons and each presents a different challenge for arms-control and enforcement systems.

Ballistic missiles and advanced munitions reach non-state actors through several pathways. One important pathway is state sponsorship. State sponsorship is when a country's government transfers weapons to a non-state group to advance its own goals.[238] Hezbollah is an armed group based in Lebanon. By 2006, Hezbollah was estimated to possess approximately 13,000–14,000 rockets and missiles. Iran was its primary supplier, with many weapons transferred through Syria.[239] These supplies may include conversion kits which add GPS navigation and guidance systems to existing rockets. These kits can allow an unguided rocket to strike a specific target more accurately.[240] These transfers show how state support can give a non-state actor capabilities that it would struggle to develop independently.

The Houthis have acquired missiles in two distinct ways. The first is state transfer. The Houthis receive explosives broken into parts like a warhead, fuel, and body. These can be smuggled into Yemen separately to avoid detection. Once assembled, these weapons may be capable of striking targets more than 1,000 kilometers away.[241] During the Yemeni Civil War, the Houthis also seized weapons from the Yemeni military. This included missiles the Yemeni government had bought from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).[242]

Example of the types of rockets supplied to Hezbollah

Credit: Tasnim News Agency

These pathways show how non-state groups can build their missile arsenals by combining state support with battlefield opportunity.[243] States often use smuggling networks and shipping companies to help them do so. They can also use front groups. These are organizations that appear to be civilian or commercial, but are used to secretly move weapons. Sanctioned states may also seek revenue by attempting to sell weapons through international intermediaries. In 2019, a UN Panel of Experts reported that the DPRK had attempted to supply small arms, light weapons, and other military equipment to the Houthis through a foreign intermediary.[244] The same network pursued possible arms deals in Libya and Sudan.[245] Despite this, these allegations are not proven beyond a doubt, and the DPRK has denied these claims.

A chemical weapon is a toxic substance that is intended to cause harm or death. They can poison the body through skin contact or inhalation.[246] Examples include nerve agents, like sarin, that shut down the nervous system or blister agents, like mustard gas, which burn the skin and lungs. Chemical precursors are substances that can be made into a toxic agent. Because many chemical precursors have civilian uses, they are often legally available on consumer markets. Conflict Armament Research confirmed that ISIL obtained dual-use chemicals and other materials through commercial supply chains in multiple countries. ISIL forces then used mustard agent and chlorine in attacks across Syria and Iraq between 2014 and 2017. The dual-use nature of these chemicals makes them difficult to track and potentially extremely dangerous. Other non-state actors like Al-Qaeda in Iraq have used a similar approach of buying precursors for later harmful uses.[247]

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) helps implement the Chemical Weapons Convention. Its work includes verifying the destruction of declared chemical-weapons stockpiles and assisting states in preventing the misuse of toxic chemicals. However, membership in the Chemical Weapons Convention cannot by itself prevent an armed group from developing chemical weapons during a conflict.[248] For example, Iraq joined the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2009 and declared remnants of chemical weapons stored in two bunkers at the Al-Muthanna site. When ISIL occupied the

surrounding area in 2014, most of the declared materials were old, damaged, sealed inside bunkers, or difficult to use.[249] Therefore, ISIL developed its own chemical-weapons program using other materials, equipment, facilities, and technical knowledge available in Iraq. UN investigators found that ISIL manufactured and used chemical weapons against civilians and security forces.[250] This example shows that states must secure dangerous sites and materials but also monitor access to technical expertise, specialized equipment, and dual-use chemicals that non-state actors could use to produce new weapons.

Drones are another type of advanced weapon. In 2024, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism identified commercial availability as one pathway through which terrorist groups may obtain unmanned aircraft systems.[251] In Latin America, criminal groups have adopted commercial drones rapidly. The Jalisco Cartel New Generation is one of Mexico's most powerful criminal groups. It has historically used commercially bought drones and rigged them with explosives. In the first half of 2023, authorities confirmed 260 drone attacks.[252]

These examples demonstrate four major acquisition pathways: state support, battlefield capture, commercial purchase, and international transfers of technical knowledge. Effective controls must account for all four rather than focusing only on completed weapons crossing national borders.

MOTIVATIONS AND CAPABILITIES OF NON-STATE ACTORS

The motivations and capabilities of non-state actors are diverse and have rapidly changed over time. Their different goals, structures, and sources of support make it difficult to address every group through one international framework.[253] Non-state actors include religiously and ideologically driven groups, revolutionary movements, criminal networks, and groups sponsored by states.[254] Their motivations may include ideology, political exclusion, territorial control, profit, religious beliefs, or opposition to a government. These motivations influence which weapons groups seek, who may support them, and how they obtain technology.[255]

Non-state actor violence is a global pattern. For example, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) carried out its first armed drone attack in December 2024.[256] It struck military sites in Nigeria using commercial drones modified to carry explosive payloads. ISWAP is an armed extremist group that seeks to replace existing governments with its interpretation of Islamic rule.[257] It operates mainly in the Lake Chad Basin, including parts of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. It has fought the region's security forces for approximately a decade.

ISWAP did not build their capability alone.[258] A July 2025 United Nations Security Council report stated that 13 Islamic State trainers from the Middle East arrived in the Lake Chad Basin in late 2024 to help ISWAP acquire, assemble, and deploy drones. This suggests that technical knowledge was transferred through the wider

ISIL developed its own chemical-weapons program using other materials, equipment, facilities, and technical knowledge available in Iraq

Type of drones modified for enhanced attacks

Credit: Judgefloro

international Islamic State network, rather than developed entirely within ISWAP.[259]

Al-Qaeda is a global extremist organization founded in 1988. It uses violence to oppose Western influence and governments that it views as enemies of its interpretation of Islam. Al-Qaeda operates through a network of regional branches that exploit local conflicts around the world.[260] Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) is an Al-Qaeda affiliate in the Sahel. It has conducted drone-enabled attacks in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Togo. It combines an extremist political and religious agenda with efforts to exploit local issues against governments and security forces. JNIM carried out at least 17 armed drone attacks between September 2023 and mid-2026. The group has reportedly modified Chinese-made drones that were modified to carry explosives.[261] Their commercial availability lowered the cost of developing an aerial attack capability.

Al-Shabaab is another Al-Qaeda affiliate that controls large areas of southern and central Somalia. It is driven by Somali clan politics. It has exploited political instability and divisions among communities while pursuing its own extremist ideology.[262] Al-Shabaab has sought to expand its military capabilities through modified commercial drones, foreign training, smuggling networks, and experiments with 3D printing.[263] In mid-2024, Puntland Somalia's security forces arrested seven suspects transporting drones modified to carry explosives. Officials believed that the drones had come from Houthi-controlled Yemen and were intended for Al-Shabaab, although these claims were not independently confirmed.[264] Separately, a 2024 UN report stated that Al-Shabaab was experimenting with 3D printing to manufacture parts used to adapt commercial drones.[265] As non-state actor groups grow, so do their connections with other groups. This results in innovative ways to expand attack capabilities.

These groups have different motivations, but their weapons development follows similar patterns: they combine commercially available equipment with foreign support, battlefield experience, and technical knowledge shared across borders. These cases reflect a broader shift in what non-state actors are capable of and how quickly that capacity can grow. Falling costs and improving

commercial technology allow some groups to acquire capabilities that previously required state support or specialized military production.[266] ISWAP, JNIM, and Al-Shabaab all demonstrate how non-state actors can experiment with commercial systems and share expertise through regional or international networks.[267] This creates new challenges for export controls, border enforcement, and international cooperation.

Current Status

CURRENT INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

Resolution 1540 requires states to stop non-state actors from getting nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. In 2024, Secretary-General António Guterres warned that rapid technological development could make weapons of mass destruction easier to acquire and use. He urged states to implement Resolution 1540 fully.[268]

The 1540 Committee, which was created to monitor compliance, gave the Security Council an update in November 2025. By then, 185 member states had filed an initial report describing their implementation measures, while eight had not.[269] However, only 39 states had submitted a voluntary action plan identifying specific priorities and concrete steps.[270] This gap between meeting minimum requirements and building a comprehensive plan shows that reporting does not necessarily produce complete implementation. International agreements can only address this issue when states translate their commitments into effective laws, institutions, and enforcement.

Preventing non-state actors from acquiring advanced weapons also depends on whether states have the resources and technical knowledge needed to enforce international controls. The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) runs three regional centers based in Togo, Peru, and Nepal. Since 2020, UNODA has helped 13 states finish national implementation plans.[271] These plans help governments identify gaps in their laws, border controls, storage systems, and enforcement institutions that non-state actors could exploit.

The Asia-Pacific center based in Nepal coordinated biosecurity measures in 2024 with 10 member states of the Association of South East Asian Nations. This work helped states secure biological materials, including disease-causing pathogens, against theft or misuse by terrorist groups and other non-state actors. In 2024, the Africa center ran its first assessment mission in Burundi. The mission helped Burundi write a national plan against illegal firearms. The mission used the Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium, a set of UN guidelines for controlling small arms and preventing their diversion to unauthorized users.[272] In the Caribbean, the regional center helped the Bahamas finish its own national plan. This plan supports a regional roadmap for reducing illegal firearms trafficking by 2030.

The Burundi and Bahamas examples relate to firearms rather than advanced weapons. However, both demonstrate how international rules accomplish little if the states lack the institutions, training, or technology needed to enforce them. These centers help states develop laws, national plans, biosecurity measures, and weapons controls that reduce opportunities for non-state actors to obtain dangerous materials.

The Arms Trade Treaty marked 10 years in force during 2024. It is the first legally binding treaty to regulate the international trade in conventional arms. It now covers 118 States Parties, countries that have formally ratified, accepted, approved, or acceded to the Treaty and are legally bound by it. There are additionally 25 signatories that have signed but not ratified the Treaty and are therefore not bound by all requirements.[273] The Treaty applies to weapon categories including missiles, missile launchers, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, ammunition, and certain parts and components used to assemble these

weapons.[274]

Before approving an export, Article 7 requires a state to assess whether the weapons could undermine peace and security or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian or human rights law. Exporting states must also consider whether the weapons could be used to support terrorism or transnational organized crime. If there is an overriding risk of these consequences, the export must be denied. Article 11 requires parties to take measures to prevent transferred weapons from being diverted to unauthorized users, including non-state armed groups. However, several of the world's largest arms exporters have still not joined the Treaty. Reporting on transfers has also dropped recently.[275]

Recent conflict has increased pressure to restrict advanced weapons transfers. The Russia-Ukraine War is an example of this kind of conflict. In October 2022, the United States published a plan to stop advanced conventional weapons from being diverted in Eastern Europe. The risk was that weapons and equipment sent to Ukraine could be captured or diverted to non-state actors.[276]

The plan had three parts. The first was helping Ukrainian and neighboring forces track their weapons. The second was strengthening border security in the region. The third was building up local police and border agencies to catch illegal trafficking. Captured weapons by pro-Russian forces were flagged as a major diversion risk. Two months later, the UN's High Representative for Disarmament Affairs pointed out verified reports of advanced conventional weapons reaching non-state armed groups.[277] Because of this, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General of Disarmament Affairs, urged States to track the flow of weapons using the UN Register of Conventional Arms, a database where states voluntarily report their own arms transfers.[278]

In May 2023, a senior UN official briefed the Security Council on the Sahel region in Africa. The official noted that non-state actors kept attacking communities and security forces in the border areas between Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. This was despite years of cooperation under the Group of Five for the Sahel, a security partnership among Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Insecurity in these areas also makes it harder to detect weapons and components moving across national borders. The official warned that the Tripartite Agreement among the G5 Sahel, European Union, and United Nations, would expire the following month. Under the agreement, the European Union funded MINUSMA's delivery of fuel, food rations, medical evacuation, and engineering assistance to the G5 Sahel Joint Force. Its expiration therefore threatened to leave the Joint Force without important operational support.[279]

Although this agreement provided important logistical support, it did not resolve the Joint Force's broader operational weaknesses. The Joint Force continued to face shortages of reliable funding, equipment, infrastructure, and political coordination. The UN also emphasized that stabilizing the region required states and international partners to better align their policies and approaches.[280] These weaknesses directly affect efforts to prevent non-state actors from acquiring advanced weapons. Without reliable intelligence, surveillance equipment, and cross-border coordination, regional forces may struggle to identify weapons shipments, track technical support networks, or intercept advanced components moving between countries.

EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Arms control analysts use the term "emerging technologies" for a combination of new advanced weapons. Artificial intelligence and cyberweapons fall under this umbrella.[281] Of these, autonomous weapons have received the most sustained diplomatic attention.

Lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) have no single legally agreed upon definition.

Discussions distinguish systems according to how much human control remains over selecting and attacking a target. In a supervised autonomous weapon system, the weapon selects and strikes a target on its own, but a person is monitoring in real time and can stop an attack.[282] In a fully autonomous weapon system, no person is monitoring at all, and the weapon uses artificial intelligence to navigate, select a target, and strike. Finally, semi-autonomous weapon systems navigate and select a target, but leave the decision to strike up to a human overseer.[283] Weapons select targets based on data given to the program on what the attackers target may look like. This system could fail detection and choose to target a civilian instead of a combatant.[284]

These weapons have been allegedly involved in many non-state actor conflicts. In 2020, a UN Panel of Experts reported that autonomous drones were used to attack militia fighters in Libya. The drone's manufacturer disputed the fact that their drones had been used for this.[285] Accountability is required at the manufacturer and state level to fully address this issue.

Since 2017, state representatives have worked in the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems to draft a solution.[286] This group is currently discussing a legal definition for LAWS and regulations surrounding them. Some states support banning while others argue regulation. However, controls on complete weapons would not necessarily cover commercial software, sensors, or drones that groups could modify independently.

Cyberweapons are another example of advanced weapons that non-state actors have been able to acquire. Groups have historically used these weapons to increase funds for their operations.[287] Ransomware is malicious software that locks a victim out of their own files. The software will then scramble and change every file until it cannot be opened. The attacker will then demand payment for the software to be disabled.[288]

This technology is not developed by non-state actors themselves. Most of it is moved through a rental system known as ransomware-as-a-service.[289] Developers will write the code and host the servers that the software runs on. They then lease access to other criminal groups in exchange for money. [290] The non-state actors are the ones that actually break into the victims network and set off the attack.

Ransomware attacks are prevalent around the world. In 2021, a ransomware attack crippled Ireland's national health system. Hospitals had to cancel appointments and surgeries, and patients' medical records ended up getting leaked online.[291] In 2022, the Conti Ransomware group broke into 27 government institutions in Costa Rica, including municipalities and state-run utilities.[292] The group then demanded tens of millions of dollars in ransom for the information.[293] In 2024, a ransomware attack was done on Change Healthcare, a health technology company. This attack produced the largest data breach of health information in US history. It exposed the records of nearly 190 million Americans.[294] These examples show how criminal non-state actors can acquire advanced cyber capabilities through service-based markets and

In 2021, a ransomware attack crippled Ireland's national health system

use them against state institutions.

Markets are not the only way this technology is acquired. In 2017, a tool built by the US National Security Agency, called EternalBlue, was stolen. EternalBlue was initially built as a cyberweapon.[295] This program was published by a non-state actor known as Shadow Brokers. Other actors later incorporated the leaked tool into major cyberattacks, demonstrating how a state-developed capability can spread after being stolen and publicly released.[296] Government response to this issue has seen the creation of the Global Mechanism. It was created by a resolution during a session of the General Assembly in November 2025.[297] This forum works to raise awareness of states and non-state actors using this technology. They also seek to establish norms for states to properly respond and defend attacks.[298] This forum currently lacks a solution to address the problem at the root issue. This being the prevention and acquisition of ransomware.

CURRENT OPERATIONAL USE OF ADVANCED WEAPONS BY NON-STATE ACTORS

Recent conflicts demonstrate how non-state actors combine state support, commercial technology, local production, and battlefield capture to develop advanced capabilities. Yemen is one country that has been heavily impacted by advanced weapons. Since 2014, the Houthi movement has controlled much of northern Yemen.[299] To restrict the group's access to weapons, the Security Council renewed targeted arms embargo measures on the group multiple times.[300] Resolution 2216 established an arms embargo targeting designated Houthi leaders and forces associated with them.[301] This embargo prohibited supplying arms to designated individuals and entities. It also banned dual-use components and electronics that go into building weapons. A UN Panel of Experts monitors compliance of this ban and reports to the Security Council. This group has found continued violations of this trading ban. States have continued to supply weapons and technical knowledge on weapon development. Dual-use electronic parts are still shipped into the country as well.[302] On July 15, 2026, the Security Council voted on the embargo and monitoring again.[303] This became Resolution 2826, which expanded this for six months. However, this is not the only region where drones are a prevalent issue.

Latin America has experienced similar issues. The Jalisco New Generation Cartel has used weaponized drones against rival groups since 2020.[304] Other Mexican criminal groups also use improvised explosive devices. Mexico's Ministry of Defense reported that handmade bombs increased from three in 2020-2021 to over 1,300 in 2022.[305] These weapons have been used across 25 of Mexico's 32 states.[306] Their low cost and accessible components allow criminal non-state actors to expand their firepower without relying on conventional arms suppliers.

The use of these weapons can also be clearly seen in Myanmar. In 2021, the Myanmar military seized power.[307] Since then, resistance fighters have been fighting with limited resources. Resistance groups have compensated for limited access to conventional weapons by using modified commercial drones and 3D printers.[308] The development of these capabilities is well documented. The conflict-monitoring group ACLED recorded the first resistance drone strike in December 2021. Since then, it has tracked over 2,100 additional drone strikes by resistance forces across 600 locations.[309] Myanmar therefore demonstrates how non-state actors can use civilian technology, digital designs, and local production to challenge a better-equipped state military.

Bloc Analysis

POINTS OF DIVISION

Countries may approach this issue based on their relationships with advanced weapons and the impact of non-state actors. Some countries manufacture and sell weapons that may fall into the hands of non-state actors. Others struggle to prevent the trafficking of advanced weapons through their borders. Some countries are directly in conflict with non-state actors that use advanced weapons. Others prioritize funding, technical assistance, and international cooperation intended to help affected countries enforce existing controls. These categories may overlap, and states within the same bloc may not support every policy discussed below.

A country that makes advanced weapons must balance new restrictions on weapons sales with the economic benefits of the arms industry. Weapon exports can support thousands of jobs and help local economies. Because of this, some countries may focus on protecting their weapon industries while also trying to prevent weapons from reaching non-state actors. Countries facing trafficking or conflict have to consider how much they can realistically enforce new rules. Because their resources may be limited, they might focus on immediate steps such as border screening, weapons tracing, drone detection, and protecting weapons storage areas. A state that prioritizes international assistance may focus on longer-term funding, training, and institution-building. However, donor states may disagree over how assistance should be financed, distributed, and monitored.

Resolution 1540 is a clear example of states agreeing on the threat that non-state actors pose. It passed unanimously in 2004, and states across every bloc have since supported it through funding, technical assistance, or direct compliance.[310] The resolution shows broad agreement that non-state actors must be prevented from acquiring WMDs. However, states disagree over whether similar international requirements should apply to advanced conventional weapons, commercial components, autonomous systems, and digital technologies.

Even when states broadly agree, different blocs may put their attention in different places. Producer states may emphasize end-user checks and controls that preserve lawful trade. States facing conflict or trafficking may prioritize border security, tracing, stockpile protection, and immediate access to detection technology. Capacity-building donors may instead focus on funding, training, and the implementation of existing frameworks. States may also disagree over whether stronger controls should be mandatory, how much information exporters should disclose, and whether international monitoring could interfere with sovereignty.

MAJOR ARMS PRODUCERS AND EXPORTERS

A small number of states account for most of the world's arms exports. Data from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute tracks the volume of major conventional weapons transferred internationally each year. Countries ranked high on this list include the United States, Russia, China, Germany, and the United Kingdom.[311] These countries do not form a unified political group. Their participation in the Arms Trade Treaty, export-control systems, reporting practices, and relationships with non-state actors differ substantially. They are grouped together because they share an interest in protecting lawful production, national defense industries, and legitimate international transfers.

Countries in this bloc may think about two major interests. First, because of their influence over the supply of weapons, these countries have a direct stake in stopping advanced weapons from reaching non-state actors. Diversion can intensify conflicts, threaten allies, and damage an exporter's international reputation.[312] Second, as suppliers of these weapons, they share a responsibility to reduce the risk that weapons are

diverted from their intended destination.

Arms exporters rely on this trade economically. Arms exports bring in billions of dollars and support large domestic industries and jobs.[313] For example, Germany's defense industry employed roughly 186,000 people in 2024 and its arms exports reached about EUR 10.3 billion that same year.[314] Countries in this bloc will want to protect their lawful exports and preserve their arms industries. This may involve finding solutions that do not unnecessarily restrict legitimate trade but still require more secure transfers.

Delegates in this bloc may discuss stronger checks on how weapons are used after delivery, tracking systems that follow a weapon, or harsher penalties for brokers who divert shipments. They may also support authenticated end-user certificates, recordkeeping, information-sharing, and assistance that helps recipient states secure weapons after delivery. These measures target diversion without automatically prohibiting lawful transfers. However, states in this bloc may resist universal post-delivery inspections, mandatory reporting, or broad controls on commercially available components. They may argue that these measures could expose sensitive security information, impose high costs, or restrict lawful civilian and military activity.

STATES FACING SECURITY AND BORDER MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

Some states involved with this issue are not producers of advanced weapons. Instead, they are countries where these weapons end up. However, membership in this bloc does not depend on whether a state also produces weapons. States in this bloc may be located near active conflict zones, affected by organized crime or armed rebellion, or positioned along major arms trafficking routes.

For example, Pakistan has spent years fighting non-state actors along its border with Afghanistan.[315] Türkiye faces trafficking challenges along its borders with Syria and Iraq. Decades of conflict with separatist groups have made the movement of fighters, weapons, and dual-use components a lasting concern.[316] Instability across a border can allow weapons and technical expertise to reach non-state actors operating inside or near their territory. Advanced weapons create additional challenges because drones, electronic components, and digital files may be harder to detect than conventional weapons. These states may therefore prioritize border security and transfer control.

Trafficking routes are another common thread. For example, Jordan sits directly on a route used to move weapons and other illicit goods from Syria.[317] Transit states positioned between production centers, commercial markets, and conflict zones may also struggle to identify suspicious shipments.[318] Countries like Poland may also be vulnerable to advanced weapons smuggling. Other countries face domestic acquisition by criminal groups. In Mexico, cartels have adapted commercial drones and accessible components into weapons.[319]

Delegates from this bloc will likely focus on the practical side of this issue. Since many weapons reach non-state actors through smuggling, this bloc has a reason to support stronger border screening, better tools for tracing weapons, and stronger security for state stockpiles. It may also seek drone-detection equipment, customs cooperation, financial investigations, and information-sharing that can identify suspicious buyers or shipments.

States in this bloc may request international funding, training, and technology because they lack the resources needed to enforce stronger controls. However, some may resist intrusive foreign inspections, conditions on assistance, or restrictions that could limit weapons supplied to state security forces. Delegates must balance the need for international assistance with concerns about sovereignty and immediate national-security needs.

Illicit guns being burned in Kenya

Credit: William Samoei Ruto

STATES PRIORITIZING INTERNATIONAL CAPACITY-BUILDING

A third group of states shares a consistent policy interest. These states want to help other governments build the security measures needed to enforce existing arms control rules. Without that capacity, even a state that agrees that a rule is important may lack the resources to stop weapons from reaching non-state actors in practice. This bloc focuses on closing the gap between international commitments and national implementation.

This bloc is defined by a policy priority rather than by geography or level of arms production. Some members may also manufacture weapons or face regional security threats. However, they place particular emphasis on long-term capacity-building, international funding, and technical assistance.

Funding mechanisms show this pattern clearly. The UNODA runs a trust fund to help states carry out Security Council Resolution 1540. This resolution made a binding rule requiring states to stop non-state actors from acquiring WMDs.[320] Contributors have included Japan, New Zealand, Norway, and the Republic of Korea.[321] A separate mechanism, the UN Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation, funds small-scale arms control projects. This fund is used to support projects implemented by states, UN bodies, civil society groups, and regional organizations. Donors have included Australia, Finland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, and Spain.[322]

This bloc may push for assistance in states affected by trafficking, armed conflict, or weak enforcement capacity. This may include technical assistance or developing arms-transfer laws, export-licensing systems, secure stockpiles, and border controls.[323] Countries in this bloc may also support information sharing to flag suspicious buyers or detect smuggling. Its central position is that international rules will remain ineffective unless states have the institutions, personnel, technology, and funding needed to enforce them.

States in this bloc may disagree over whether assistance should prioritize existing frameworks or support the negotiation of stronger international standards. They may also

debate whether funding should be voluntary, whether assistance should include monitoring requirements, and whether donor states or major weapons exporters should bear more of the cost. These blocs are not permanent alliances. Delegates may cooperate across lines depending on whether a proposal concerns export controls, commercial technology, border enforcement, international monitoring, or capacity-building.

Committee Mission

The primary goal of DISEC is to address disarmament and international-security issues through international cooperation. Its mandate covers WMDs, conventional arms, emerging weapons technologies, regional disarmament, and international arms-control arrangements.[324] DISEC can recommend actions for consideration by UN Member States or the Security Council.[325] However, it does not make national security policy directly, and cannot itself impose sanctions or create legally binding arms-control laws.[326] Through resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, it can recommend stronger national controls, promote the implementation of existing frameworks, request further UN study or reporting, and encourage negotiations on new international standards.[327]

DISEC plays an important role regarding the topic of Preventing Non-State Actors from Acquiring Advanced Weapons. When non-state actors acquire advanced weapons, they may intensify conflicts, threaten civilians, attack state institutions, and spread insecurity across national borders.[328] Commercial drones, digital design files, artificial intelligence, and other dual-use technologies evolve more quickly than many existing control systems. This makes it imperative that DISEC help countries identify and address the specific gaps that currently allow advanced weapons to end up in the hands of non-state actors.

DISEC can explore several paths to preventing acquisition and diversion. It can encourage states to strengthen implementation of Resolution 1540, including through national laws, domestic controls, voluntary implementation plans, and assistance for states that lack enforcement capability.[329] However, because Resolution 1540 focuses on WMDs, DISEC must also consider how states should address advanced conventional weapons and commercially available technologies.[330] It can recommend that member states apply stronger export-screening standards to dual-use components alongside conventional arms. It can also promote regional information-sharing mechanisms that help identify suspicious buyers, brokers, shipments, and transfers of technical expertise. DISEC may further consider end-user verification, stockpile security, customs cooperation, controls on digital weapon files, and international funding for enforcement technology and training.[331]

Delegates are encouraged to collaborate on practical solutions that close existing gaps and prevent non-state actors from acquiring advanced weapons. At the same time, delegates must balance stronger controls against national sovereignty, legitimate arms transfers, civilian uses of technology, and the different enforcement capacities of member states.

Research and Preparation Questions

Your dais has prepared the following research and preparation questions as a means of providing guidance for your research process. These questions should be carefully considered, as they embody some of the main critical thought and learning objectives surrounding your topic.

TOPIC A

1. What are the primary sources of illicit weapons within your country or region?
2. How does your country prevent the diversion of legally manufactured weapons into illicit markets?
3. What international agreements or initiatives addressing illicit small arms and light weapons does your country participate in? How does your country view the effectiveness of existing frameworks such as the UN Programme of Action and International Tracing Instrument?
4. How does your country cooperate with neighboring states and international organizations to prevent cross-border arms trafficking?
5. How should your country respond to emerging challenges such as privately made firearms, modular weapons, polymer components, and 3D-printed firearm parts that may be more difficult to mark, regulate, or trace?
6. How are organized crime, corruption, armed groups, or other illicit markets connected to small arms trafficking in your country or region, and what measures could address these networks beyond simply seizing weapons?
7. What barriers, such as limited funding and weak institutions, hinder international efforts to prevent the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons?

TOPIC B

1. Where do your country's export control laws fall short in properly regulating dual-use technology?
2. Is your country a major arms exporter? Is your country directly involved in a conflict with a non-state actor?
3. What measures has your country taken through domestic law, export controls, or international agreements to prevent weapons from reaching non-state actors?
4. How can weapons tracking, information sharing, and border security be strengthened while maintaining state sovereignty?
5. What kind of assistance should be provided to countries that lack the capacity to enforce export controls?
6. What economic or security interests should your country consider when deciding how strictly to regulate advanced and dual-use technologies?

Important Documents

TOPIC A

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About the Authors

TOPIC A: MIRABELLE KRUGER

Mirabelle (Ella) Kruger is an undergraduate at the University of California, Davis, where she studies psychology and international relations with minors in education and sociology. Originally from California, she is a member of the Air Force ROTC program, where she has developed a strong interest in leadership, public service, and international security. Her academic interests center on developmental psychology and personality studies, driven by a curiosity about how people think, grow, and make decisions. Mirabelle has been involved in Model United Nations for several years and enjoys exploring complex global challenges through debate, diplomacy, and collaboration. She previously served as an Assistant Director for NHSMUN's United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and has served as a committee chair at her university's Davis Model United Nations Conference (DMUNC). She is excited to return to NHSMUN as the Director of the Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC). Outside of Model UN, she works as a substitute teacher and has gained experience in education and victim services through the Yolo County District Attorney's Office and the Davis Police Department. Whether she is leading a committee, working with students, or supporting members of her community, Mirabelle enjoys connecting with others and finding meaningful ways to make a positive impact. After graduation, she hopes to commission as an Intelligence Officer in the United States Air Force before eventually returning to the fields of education and psychology.

TOPIC B: BECKHAM JOLLEY

Beckham Jolley is an undergraduate at Golden West College Studying business administration with a focus on finance and management. He has competed in Model United Nations since 2021, beginning at Huntington Beach High School. He specialized in General Assembly committees, and saw particular success in DISEC and UNESCO. Throughout his time in MUN he has competed far and wide, including international conferences. Outside MUN, Beckham is involved in student government where he is a part of the Publicity and Campus Engagement committee. Here, he helped shape initiatives to increase student involvement on campus. After graduating, Beckham plans to pursue a career in finance.

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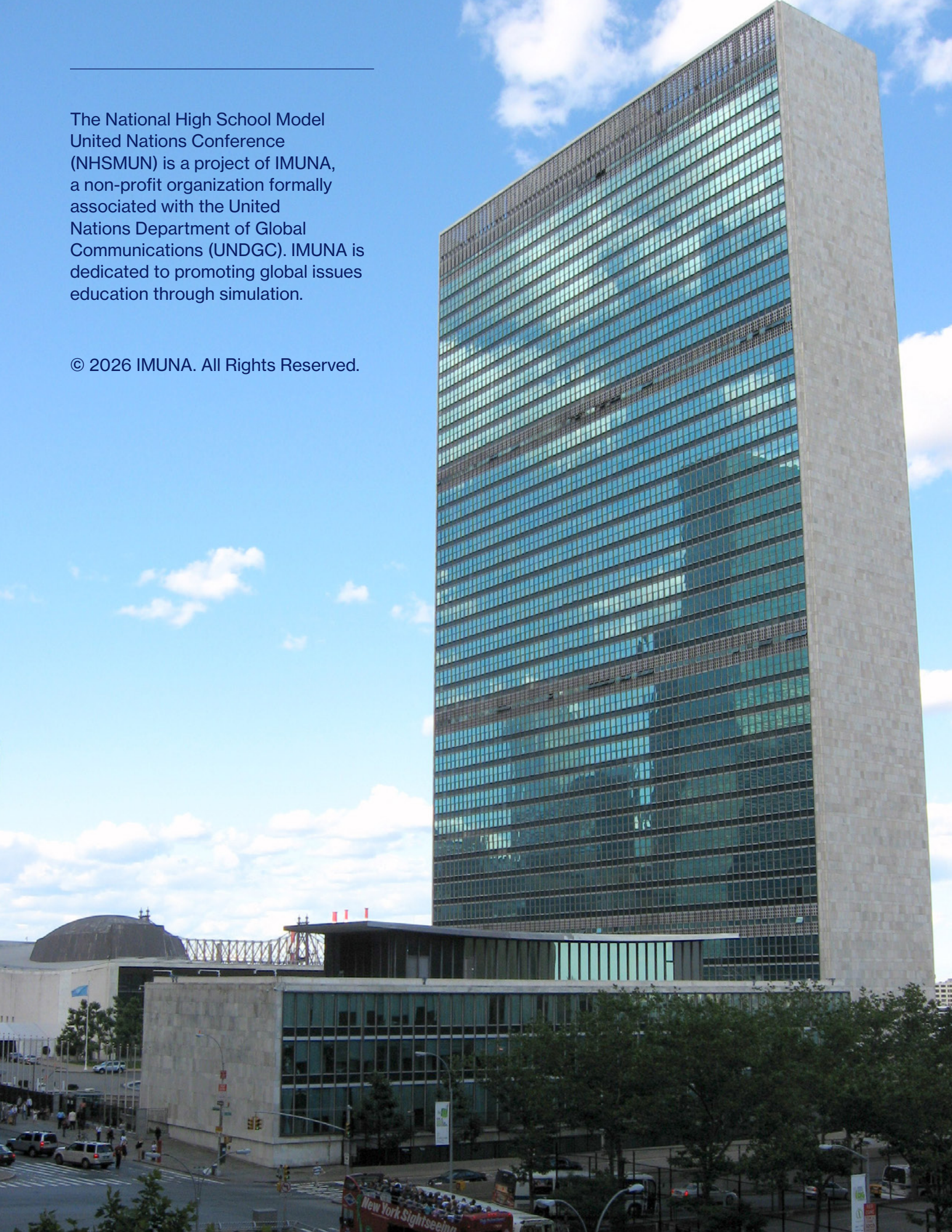
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