

Manlius Pebble Hill Model United Nations

Conference October 2025

Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC)

Chairs:

Sanaa Goyal

Sona Trikha

Preface

Welcome to the United Nations Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) at MPHMUN 2025! Your chairs for this committee are Sanaa Goyal and Sona Trikha. Sanaa is a senior at Fayetteville-Manlius High School. She enjoys traveling, going to the movies, hanging with friends, and reading in her spare time. This is her fourth conference as a chair and her second time chairing at MPHMUN. Sona is a sophomore at Manlius Pebble Hill School. She likes to play soccer, ski with friends, and travel. This is her first time chairing a conference. She is eager to be a chair at MPHMUN and is looking forward to having a great committee! This committee is a resolution-style committee, which means that all debated resolutions (one per topic) must be submitted prior to conference day. Delegates who wish to be in contention for an award must submit a position paper and resolutions on both topics by 11:59 pm on Friday, October 24th, to DISECmphmun@gmail.com. The guidelines for submission can be found on the delegate resources section of our website. Anything received after this time or any form of plagiarism or AI usage will automatically result in disqualification for an award. Delegates must also bring a laptop and computer charger to participate in committee proceedings since this is a paperless conference. If you do not have access to a laptop, please send us an email by October 18th. Please reach out to us if you have any questions, and we look forward to seeing you all on conference day!

Sona Trikha & Sanaa Goyal

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Introduction to Committee

The Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) comprises the First Committee of the larger United Nations General Assembly. This committee addresses issues relating to disarmament, global challenges, and threats to peace that affect the international community. This committee focuses on general principles of cooperation in the maintenance of international peace and security, principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments, and strengthening stability through lower levels of armaments. The committee has two main bodies that report underneath it: the Disarmament Commission (UNDC) and the Conference on Disarmament (CD).[1] The Conference on Disarmament focuses on the following issues: weapons of mass destruction disarmament, disarmament of conventional arms including small arms and light weapons, regional disarmament, which enhances global disarmament efforts and confidence measures and therefore reduces ambiguities in arms control and increases improvements in international cooperation. DISEC was formed in 1945 and the creation was directly impacted by the development of nuclear weapons after World War Two. The first ever resolution adopted by DISEC was in 1946 and was dealing with the "Establishment of a Commission to Deal with the Problems Raised by the Discovery of Atomic Energy."[2] Currently, one issue that DISEC is looking into regulating and finding ethical applications for is drones. There has been an increasing prevalence of small drones in warfare, and the committee is working to decide what their legal implications should be.[3]

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[1] United Nations. "UN General Assembly - First Committee - Disarmament and International Security." *Un.org*, 2020, www.un.org/en/ga/first/.
[2] March 16, kbonn on, and 2015. "How-to Model UN Research: GA First Committee - DISEC." Best Delegate Model United Nations, March 16, 2015. https://bestdelegate.com/how-to-model-un-research-ga-first-committee-disec/.
[3] HAMUN. "DISEC | HAMUN," 2025. https://www.hamun.org/standard-committees/disec.

Topic 1: Regulating the Use of Private Military Companies (PMCs) in Africa

Introduction

Private military and security companies (PMCs) are organizations that provide military services such as security, logistics, and support in areas of conflict. The usage of PMCs arose in areas such as Iraq and Afghanistan, where thousands of military contractors were employed by the U.S. government for military efforts. Their prominence can be traced back to the Cold War era, but their origin in the form of mercenarism and corporatization predates the fall of the Soviet Union. Since then, they have grown and expanded to countries outside the U.S., including having much influence in Africa. In current times, PMCs are used purely for war strategy. The usage of these companies is controversial as PMCs often violate international, humanitarian, and human rights laws since these groups are always driven by profit but do not consider civilian casualties or international concerns in their attempt to finish a job.

PMCs follow either one of three basic models: the South African model, the U.S./Blackwater model, and the Russian/Wagner model.[4] The South African model is based on the Executive Outcomes (EO) PMC, and is similar to traditional mercenaries that finance their model and resources from the country in which they operate. The U.S. model can be seen with the company Blackwater. It can be described as "military entrepreneurship," which strengthens the traditional armed forces of a powerful state. The Russian model can be seen with Wagner, which draws from the two models previously described but also operates with no regard for human rights or respect for international humanitarian law. One interesting thing to note as well is the gradual increase of private security companies (PSCs) in China. Currently, it is estimated that there are about 20 to 40 PSCs operating around the world. PSCs differ from the

[4] Council of the European Union. *The Business of War -Growing Risks from Private Military Companies*. 31 Aug. 2023, www.consilium.europa.eu/media/66700/private-military-companies-final-31-august.pdf.

Russia/Wagner approach, and they focus more on protecting Chinese economic interests and their citizens. However, they are similar in that they both involve themselves with authoritarian enforcement.

Regardless of the differences between models, each PMC group is extremely important as they provide things such as research and analysis on defense-related topics, cyber and tech services, system support, support in combat, intelligence, armed security, and communication. Through the use of PMCs, state actors (entities that work on behalf of the government) can accomplish both military and economic goals and allow state or government officials to evade responsibility for their actions.

History

For thousands of years, mercenary activity has been around. They were mostly prevalent in Greece, Rome, Egypt and the Mesopotamian regions. They were mostly used to fill gaps and avoid conscripting citizens or local people into armies. For example, the Greek hoplites served as mercenaries in Egypt, Persia, Sicily and Carthage in the 4th and 5th centuries.[5] They often used a variety of weaponry, organized in large numbers and were extremely effective in warfare.

For the past five decades, the African subcontinent has been debated due to the region being politically unstable. During the 19th to 20th centuries, the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 formalized rules for colonization of Africa. In this conference, the African continent was divided among major European powers of Britain, France, Germany, and Portugal.[6] In this division, there was no consideration for the cultural diversity of each region, including thousands of tribal, clan, and familial groupings. There has been a significant amount of evidence that suggests that ethnic cleavages in Africa are the source of domestic instability and conflict, where rebel groups are known to play upon ethnic differences to ascend to power. For example, one way that African societies organize themselves is through segmentary lineage systems, which experience 84% more deadly conflicts than societies without this system.[7] This specifically can be traced back to colonial legacies. When African states began to gain independence in the 1960s, foreign donors hoped that consolidated states would emerge. However, there were none, and a dependent relationship was created between independent stronger nations and newly formed African states.[8]

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[5] "6 Historical Legendary Mercenary Armies." *The Business Standard*, 25 June 2023, www.tbsnews.net/world/6-historical-legendary-mercenary-armies-655686. Accessed 1 Sept. 2025.
[6] Sheposh, Richard. "Scramble for Africa | EBSCO." *EBSCO Information Services, Inc. | Www.ebsco.com*, 2023, www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/scramble-africa.
[7] "Social Structure and Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa." *CEPR*, 9 Jan. 2018, cepr.org/voxeu/columns/social-structure-and-conflict-sub-saharan-africa?utm_source=chatgpt.com. Accessed 31 Aug. 2025.
[8] University, Stanford, et al. "Social Conflict and Political Violence in Africa." *Spice.fsi.stanford.edu*,spice.fsi.stanford.edu/docs/social_conflict_and_political_violence_in_africa.

Courts are corrupt, armies are underfunded, education and healthcare facilities are poor, and economic activity is concentrated in diamond mines, plantations, and oil wells, creating a vicious cycle of poverty in Africa. The legal frameworks that exist around courts are extremely complex and often unclear, as PMCs cannot be prosecuted in national or international courts for violations of the law. This is further complicated by the fact that PMCs often sign immunity agreements with contracting states which distinguishes them from mercenaries or terrorists.[9] African nations are very susceptible to civil violence activity due to colonial and post-independence history, which has left governments weak and economies dependent on the export of a few commodities.

PMCs were introduced into Africa after independence from countries such as the U.S., U.K., and Russia. Many African nations were scrambling to access PMCs because they could no longer rely on the U.S. or the Soviet Union for military or security support. One of the earliest examples of the rise of PMCs in Africa can be found with the South African firm Executive Outcomes (EO). The EO was a business venture, and like most business ventures, they were profit-oriented and were able to leverage their military and security services to their advantage. For example, in Sierra Leone, the EO gained access to lucrative diamond mines and was able to profit off the mines immensely in exchange for military and security services.

These PMC groups, however, have often violated international and humanitarian concerns in addition to exploiting and gaining economic advantages via natural resources. These companies often ignore the law of armed conflict and participate in rape and sexual violence and have policies that feature indiscriminate targeting.

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[9] Heinemann-Gruder, Andres. "Dogs of War: Russia's Corporate Warriors in Armed Conflicts." *European Union Institute for Security Studies*, 14 June 2023, www.iss.europa.eu/publications/briefs/dogs-war-russias-corporate-warriors-armed-conflicts. Accessed 1 Sept. 2025.

Exploitation of Natural Resources

Natural resources, such as lumber and coal, are at the core of production processes. The limited availability of natural resources can drive up prices and make their extraction and trade highly profitable. The African subcontinent historically has been rich in resources such as oil, diamonds, gold, copper, cobalt, timber, iron, palm oil, coffee, etc. This can be a point of instability as high competition for resources can lead to internal and external wars.

One concern surrounding PMCs involves the exploitation of natural resources and access to land. Often, PMCs offer their military and security support, and in exchange, PMCs get access to lucrative economic ventures to fuel their profit-driven needs. Companies such as Executive Outcomes (EO) have made deals with countries such as Sierra Leone in order to gain access to lucrative diamond and gold mines. Another example can be found in Angola, where the National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA) used the clandestine diamond economy to fund its involvement in the Angolan civil war.[10] This offers a clear linkage between private military security firms and the global economy.

Another prominent PMC in Africa would be Sandline International, a U.K.-based private military company, after the dissolution of Executive Outcomes in 1999. To fulfill the contracts of EO, Sandline International provided logistical and aviation support. During the Sierra Leone Civil War, EO and Sandline International were contracted by the government to fight the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Both companies were partnered with Branch Energy, at which point Executive Outcomes retook key diamond-mining areas from the Revolutionary

[10] Butler, Leroy. *Natural Resources and Private Military Security Companies: How Do They Affect Civil War Duration?* 2019, apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1112118.pdf. Accessed 22 June 2025.

United Front (RUF), and by 1996, the EO was charging 1.8 million per month for their military services in addition to profiting off the mine ventures.[11]

The exploitation of natural resources can also be seen with Blackwater, a U.S.-based private military company. In 2018, Erik Prince, the founder of Blackwater, had plans to privatise the Afghanistan war and mine the country's minerals and resources such as lithium, gas and gold. Untapped Afghanistan minerals such as copper, zinc, iron ore, aluminum, silver, gold, mercury, lithium, and rare earth elements are estimated to be worth $1 trillion to $3 trillion.[12]

Delegates should aim to regulate the usage of these PMCs and the exploitation of natural resources that come along with it. Recently, the Wagner group has made very similar attempts to the EO in which they exploited contracts and buyers. For instance, in Syria, the Wagner group was promised about 25% of the revenue generated by oil and gas fields that were reclaimed. In the Central African Republic, the Wagner group has done something similar and embedded itself in diamond and gold mining concessions as well as other commodities such as timber, coffee, and alcohol in exchange for their military services. [13] In addition, delegates should aim to strengthen legal frameworks regarding the usage of PMCs and improve funding for African governments in order to promote good governance as well as alternative ways to strengthen the economy and military, so that PMC reliance is lower.

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[11] "Sandline International and the Part It Played in Recruiting Mercenaries around the World." *Terryaspinall.com*, 2025, www.terryaspinall.com/03merc/sierra-leone/chronology-of-sierra-leone.html. Accessed 31 July 2025.
[12] Loewenstein, Antony. "Afghan Minerals in the Crosshairs of Blackwater's Erik Prince." *Trt.global*, TRT Global, 14 Nov. 2018, trt.global/world/article/12710929. Accessed 31 July 2025.
[13] Faulkner, Christopher M. "ICoCA Blog - Why Private Military and Security Companies Persist in Africa?" *ICoCA Blog*, 29 Nov. 2023, blog.icoca.ch/why-private-military-security-companies-persist-in-africa/.

Human Rights Violations

Another point of discussion that revolves around the impact of PMCs in Africa is the violation of human rights and international humanitarian concerns. For example, in countries such as Mali, Russian mercenaries staged a mass grave using real bodies to frame French forces and discredit counterterrorism operations in April 2022. Pixelated images of corpses buried in sand were posted on a Twitter account. Countries such as France and the U.S. have accused Wagner mercenaries of human rights abuses in Mali, and earlier in April, Wagner was accused of leading an attack on the village of Moura in central Mali, where 300 men were executed.[14] According to the Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, two drone strikes killed thirteen civilians and seven children aged 2-17, as well as a pregnant woman who miscarried after the incident. [15] Between August 2023 and August 2024, there has been an "81% increase in violence involving Russian mercenaries and a 61% increase in reported fatalities."[16]

There has been many reports of PMC personnel from companies such as Wagner participating in activities of rape and sexual violence. In the Central African Republic (CAR) town of Bouar, two girls recount how two Russian mercenaries sexually assaulted them. This has had the effect of women and girls avoiding the fields and has resulted in food shortages. Sexual violence has grown in the Central African Republic and other countries, as it has been documented that about 15,000 cases of sexual violence have occurred.[17]

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[14] Burke, Jason. "France Says Russian Mercenaries Staged 'French Atrocity' in Mali." *The Guardian*, 22 Apr. 2022, www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/22/france-says-russian-wagner-mercenaries-staged-french-atrocity-in-mali.
[15] "Wagner Mercenaries Helping Mali Army Kill Civilians, Rights Groups Say." *Voice of America*, 28 Mar. 2024, www.voanews.com/a/wagner-mercenaries-helping-mali-army-kill-civilians-rights-groups-say/7548319.html.
[16] Faulkner, Christopher, and Raphael Parens. "Russia in Africa: Private Military Proxies in the Sahel - Georgetown Journal of International Affairs." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 24 Mar. 2025, gjia.georgetown.edu/2025/03/24/russia-in-africa-private-military-proxies-in-the-sahel/.
[17] Jr, Philip Obaji. "'They Turn Our Farms into Rape Centres': Russian Mercenaries Accused of Abuse in Central African Republic." *The Guardian*, The Guardian, 23 July 2024, www.theguardian.com/global-development/article/2024/jul/23/central-african-republic-women-girls-rape-sexual-violence-conflict-food-security-wagner-russian-mercenaries-un.

PMCs such as Wagner do not take responsibility, citing plausible deniability, which allows Wagner to deny involvement because there is no concrete evidence linking them to the event in question. The lack of responsibility is problematic, as states can pursue their political agendas without political or legal consequences of direct involvement.

There have also been cases with Blackwater that are not limited to the African subcontinent. For example, on September 16, 2007, a convoy of Blackwater contractors were reported to have opened fire near the Mansour District in Iraq and shot a small car containing a couple and a child. A report issued after the incident claimed that at least 20 Iraqi civilians were killed. Additionally, this was not the first incident, as government officials have claimed that there have been seven incidents since then, including an incident where a Blackwater employee got drunk and shot at a guard of the Iraqi vice president.[18] In addition, in 2024, Erik Prince was found to be linked to a shady mercenary deal in the Democratic Republic of Congo's war-torn North Kivu.

The delegate's main objective should be to mitigate the role of plausible deniability and set up systems that track PMCs and use that to hold PMCs such as Wagner accountable for civilian casualties in Africa. In addition, updated frameworks and more binding agreements should be considered.

[18] Singer, Peter W. "The Dark Truth about Blackwater." *Brookings*, 2 Oct. 2007, www.brookings.edu/articles/the-dark-truth-about-blackwater/.

Interference in Governance

The last issue that revolves around the involvement of PMCs in African nations is their influence on government affairs. Wagner, for example, has cultivated exploitative relationships with multiple African governments by trading their military and security services for political access to capitalize and profit on the continent's instability. Between 2015 and 2019, Wagner signed 19 military collaboration agreements with African governments that were most related to weapons sales. The contracts that Wagner proposed include provisions for training military forces, security for political elites and Russian businesses, and engaging in disinformation campaigns. This is problematic because it undermines state sovereignty and contributes to instability, as PMCs such as Wagner may prolong conflict rather than bring peace and stability.

In Sudan, the Russian government had a meeting with then-President Omar al-Bashir in 2017, where a portfolio culminated in agreements related to mining concessions, geological explorations, oil and gas operations, and plans to establish a Russian naval base in Port Sudan.[19] In the Central African Republic (CAR), Wagner, through their operations, insinuated themselves in the country's political, economic, and social structures. Wagner not only infiltrated local markets through force but also installed a Russian national as President Faustin-Archange Touadera's chief security advisor. In addition, Russia lobbied for an arms embargo expedition in the UN Security Council to Bangui, CAR's capital, under the guise of peacekeeping operations. As a result, more than 1,000 Wagner mercenaries were operating in CAR which created resentment and friction in nations.[20]

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[19] Hummel, Kristina. "Undermining Democracy and Exploiting Clients: The Wagner Group's Nefarious Activities in Africa." *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, 23 June 2022, ctc.westpoint.edu/undermining-democracy-and-exploiting-clients-the-wagner-groups-nefarious-activities-in-africa/.
[20] Faulkner, Christopher, and Raphael Parens. "Russia in Africa: Private Military Proxies in the Sahel - Georgetown Journal of International Affairs." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 24 Mar. 2025, gjia.georgetown.edu/2025/03/24/russia-in-africa-private-military-proxies-in-the-sahel/.

In addition to government involvement, there have been many efforts by PMCs such as Wagner to derail efforts of democracy in Africa. According to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, ¾ of African citizens aspire to see democracy flourish throughout their countries, including sovereignty and the right to self-determination. 31 African countries have seen their democracy scores decline over the past 5 years due to Russia's disruption of democratic processes, including blocking UN resolutions that condemn human rights and the deployment of Wagner's military forces.[21]

Currently, there are multiple international documents and pieces of legislation that attempt to regulate the role of PMCs in Africa. For example, the Montreux Document provides a blueprint for the regulation of PMCs through the identification of three different groups: contracting states (states that hire PMCs), territorial states (where PMCs operate), and home states (the country the PMC is affiliated with). It provides a basis for existing international law but is not a legally binding treaty.[22] Additionally, the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (ICoC), aims to operate in a manner that supports the rule of law and establishes and maintains an effective internal governance framework. This code supports the Montreux Document but also supports the responsible provision of security services to respect human rights and protect the interests of clients.[23]

Delegates should attempt to strengthen existing legal frameworks, such as the Montreux document as well as address gaps in governance to reduce PMC reliance and have more effective regulation.

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[21] Africa Center for Strategic Studies. "Tracking Russian Interference to Derail Democracy in Africa." *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, 21 June 2023, africacenter.org/spotlight/russia-interference-undermine-democracy-africa/.
[22] "The Montreux Document on Private Military and Security Companies." *Montreux Document Forum*, www.montreuxdocument.org/about/montreux-document.html.
[23] ICoCA. *INTERNATIONAL CODE of CONDUCT for PRIVATE SECURITY SERVICE PROVIDERS*. 2021, icoca.ch/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/INTERNATIONAL-CODE-OF-CONDUCT_Amended_2021.pdf.

Guiding Questions

1. How have African nations such as Mali and Sudan been affected by the usage of PMCs around the world? Consider the complex relationship between PMCs, governments, and foreign actors. What are some ways the UN can hold PMCs more accountable for crimes against humanity in Africa, especially when home states are unwilling to prosecute?
2. How can the UN better allocate resources to protect human rights violations and prevent the exploitation of natural resources?
3. What restrictions or regulations can be implemented to limit PMC's access to natural resources in African countries? Consider the balance between foreign investment and ethical regulations.

Further Readings

1. Role of Private Military Contractors in Conflict Areas.

https://www.e-ir.info/2025/02/02/mercenaries-of-peace-the-role-of-private-military-contractors-in-conflict/

2. UN Press Release on Mercenaries and Private Military Companies.

https://press.un.org/en/2018/gashc4246.doc.htm

3. Paper on Private Military Companies and Future of Peacekeeping Operations

https://esil-sedi.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Agora-2-Richemond.pdf

4. Paper on Natural Resources and Private Military Companies.

https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1112118.pdf

Topic 2: Combating the Weaponization of Outer Space

Introduction

With the rapid growth of space technology, the international community has been faced with urgent concerns about how to govern and protect space. The only existing legal framework was created when space weapons did not have the same capacity they do today. This makes it a struggle to utilize these documents, especially as more private companies enter space. Due to the high level of controversy regarding new space issues, it has been difficult to agree upon and create new space documents. Space was initially dominated by a few global powers, including the United States, Russia, and China, most notably, but now it is becoming increasingly crowded and competitive. Current estimates from 2025 project that there will be over 3,000 satellite launches globally.[24] Out of over 11,700 satellites currently in orbit, around 13% of them are used for military purposes and this percentage is only predicted to grow.[25] Satellites, vital for communication, navigation, surveillance, and defense, have become essential for civilian use and military operations. As a result, these satellites are vulnerable to action in space, which could have serious consequences on Earth.

The weaponization of outer space refers to the placement of weapons in orbit or on any celestial body; however, there are several different types of space weapons that all serve various purposes. The three types are Earth-to-space, space-to-space, and space-to-Earth weapons. Earth-to-space weapons are those launched from Earth to target specific assets in space. For example, direct ascent anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons are Earth-to-space weapons, and the United States, China, India, and Russia have all experimented with these weapons. Earth-to-space

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[24] Gover, Matthew. "Record-Breaking 1,200+ Satellites Launched in 2025." Orbital Today, June 16, 2025. https://orbitaltoday.com/2025/06/16/satellite-launches-soar-to-record-levels-in-2025-as-new-players-join-the-race/.
[25] Wood, Therese. "How Many Satellites Are Operating in Space?" World Economic Forum, October 23, 2020. https://www.weforum.org/stories/2020/10/visualizing-easrth-satellites-sapce-spacex/.

weapons are the leading space weapons and pose the most significant threat among today's developments in space weaponry. Space-to-space weapons are satellites or space-based systems designed to disrupt or target other satellites or space assets. The only confirmed launch of a space-to-space weapon was by the Soviet Union during testing of a fixed 23 mm autocannon. Lastly, space-to-Earth weapons are the least developed of the weapon systems. These are systems that are deployed in space to target Earth-based assets. These weapons can have effects resulting in permanent destruction or temporary signal loss.[26]

Along with these three weapon systems, the weapons can be categorized as kinetic or non-kinetic. Kinetic weapons cause physical damage and are traditional weapons that target physical objects. An example of a kinetic weapon is the concept of "Rods from God,"which is where a satellite carrying tungsten rods that are around the size of telephone poles drops the rods onto a target on Earth, causing a nuclear-like blast without the radioactive fallout. Non-kinetic weapons are not challenging to develop and do not have the same goal of destruction; they are used to interfere with other satellites or space assets. One standard non-kinetic weapon is Jammers. Jammers work by broadcasting powerful radio signals that interfere with the target satellite's receiver, making it unable to receive or transmit data.[27]

Several small factors add up to the larger issue regarding the weaponization of outer space, primarily due to the many space sectors that were previously flawed during the initial start of space exploration. Three of the most pressing and prominent issues are the need for updates to old space regulations, the prevention of a space arms race, and lastly, space debris safety. Several surface-level United Nations treaties address some space; however, they were created

[26] Schumann, Anna. "Fact Sheet: Space Weapons." Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, November 15, 2023. https://armscontrolcenter.org/fact-sheet-space-weapons/.
[27] Slayton, Nicholas. "Space Force to Deploy New Jammers to Yell at Enemy Satellites." Task & Purpose, December 21, 2024. https://taskandpurpose.com/tech-tactics/space-force-jammer-screams/.

when space exploration started. Now, these treaties don't apply to a significant amount of the available technology and pose serious threats to nations and companies exploiting them and taking advantage of the loopholes in the treaties. Due to these being the only existing space warfare laws and due to them being made so long ago it is difficult to create new or adapt to the old treaties seeing as there has been so much change in space capabilities and the further capabilities to come. Secondly, as seen in the past, countries strive to have the most advanced technology, and the same applies to space. With this, there is worry about a space arms race occurring, like it did in the past during the Cold War. This is relevant to the current times too because the United Nations has already recognized this to be a significant issue they will be discussing. Lastly, space debris is caused from every launch but is a serious risk towards astronauts and other space assets. With every launch, more space debris is created, causing a buildup in space, which may lead to a never-ending cycle of space debris.

History

Space exploration gained prominence during the Cold War, resulting in a centralization of space technology development around military objectives and international competition. This ideology emerged after World War II, when the United States and the Soviet Union recognized rocket technology as the new frontier for modern warfare. This led to the development of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, or ICBMs, which are long-range missiles designed to carry nuclear warheads to targets. However, what made them special was the speed at which they could travel. The invention of ICBMs shifted warfare from an arms race to a space race. Initially, most space programs were rooted in defense and military strategies, reflecting the intense competition that emerged with the rise of space warfare. In 1957, the Soviet Union launched the first satellite, Sputnik, using military rocket technology. With this launch, the United States began to worry about falling behind in its development, prompting it to accelerate its program.[28]

Throughout the development of the new programs both the Soviet Union and the United States had different ideas for how their space programs were structured. The Soviet Union maintained a highly military-centered and secretive program. In contrast, the United States divided its program between military and civilian agencies, with NASA being a public entity, but military actions were still kept secret. During the late 1950's the United Nations began to work on an international set of laws to help maintain peace in outer space.[29] The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 was created, which prohibited weapons of mass destruction in space; however, it left a lot of room for modern military equipment to be unregulated in space. In addition, during the Cold War, the first moon landing occurred in 1969 and was a significant success for the United States.

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[28] Aerospace. "A Brief History of Space Exploration | the Aerospace Corporation." Aerospace.org, June 1, 2018. https://aerospace.org/article/brief-history-space-exploration.

[29] National Air and Space Museum. "What Was the Space Race?" National Air and Space Museum. Smithsonian, August 23, 2023. https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/what-was-space-race.

However, afterwards, the United States' focus shifted to other priorities, and the Soviet Union began to pursue other military and scientific goals.[30]

After the Cold War, cooperation increased, primarily through projects like the International Space Station, where the United States and Russia connected to build it; nevertheless, both countries kept their independent space military interests.[31] As more countries entered space, several developments have had a significant impact worldwide, including satellites for navigation, communication, and surveillance. However, despite these advancements, countries continue to fight a long battle to maintain the most advanced space technology.

The current status of space technology involves many more nations and private sectors, and the impact on the world is more widespread than it was in the past. Humans have also become increasingly reliant on this technology. It is vital that our committee is able to find solutions that protect the interests of all nations, companies, and people.

While the Outer Space Treaty laid a good foundation for peace in space, current space technology has surpassed the capacity of the legal framework provided in the treaty. This has left legal gaps and dangerous loopholes through which nations can exploit and cause international tensions. A key example of this is with the use of Anti Satellite Weapons where because they aren’t technically weapons of mass destruction they are allowed to be utilized and tested, however, they still cause significant harm and damage to astronauts and other space assets. Due to issues like this the treaties pose serious concerns about how effective they actually are.

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[30] National Air and Space Museum. “What Was the Space Race?” National Air and Space Museum. Smithsonian, August 23, 2023. https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/what-was-space-race.
[31] National Air and Space Museum. “What Was the Space Race?” National Air and Space Museum. Smithsonian, August 23, 2023. https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/what-was-space-race.

Updating International Space Law

The Outer Space Treaty, also known as the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, serves as a 'constitution' for all laws regarding space; however, it also serves as the umbrella for four smaller United Nations space treaties. The Outer Space Treaty, adopted by the United Nations in 1967, is the primary document governing international space law. The main concept is that space must be used for peaceful purposes, and no one owns or occupies space. Some of the other additional key points in this treaty are that states are responsible for all space activities, including those of private companies, which also means that states are liable for any damages caused by space activities; military actions, weapon testing, Furthermore the permanent placement of military assets is prohibited on any celestial body; states must avoid the contamination of celestial bodies, and the utilization of space must be beneficial towards all countries.[32]

In 1968, the second space treaty, the Rescue Agreement, was established to outline the necessary precautions for astronauts, including the requirement that states inform the launching authority and the United Nations in the event of a fallen space object or an astronaut in distress. This also means that the state responsible for the launch must reimburse all costs for recovery and return, regardless of whether the astronaut or object lands in international waters or uninhabited regions. This agreement has been beneficial towards the international community by enhancing astronaut safety, preventing conflict in space, and enhancing international cooperation. This agreement also helps with allowing the safe retrieval of space objects that land outside the launching state's territory.

[32] United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs. "The Outer Space Treaty." UNOOSA. Accessed July 7, 2025. https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties/introouterspacetreaty.html.

The third treaty is the Liability Convention, which was signed in 1972. The principles in this treaty overlap with some from the first Outer Space Treaty, specifically in the case where both treaties state that countries are liable for any damages caused by objects they own in space. However, this also includes absolute liability, fault-based liability, and claims pressing, where a country can seek compensation from another. Absolute liability means that no matter why the damage was caused, either on the Earth or to the aircraft, the state is reliable no matter what. On the other hand, fault-based liability is where a country can be proven guilty for the damages; then they will be held responsible. All liabilities cover damages to property, people, or other space objects. One example was in 1978 when the Soviet satellite (Cosmos 954) malfunctioned and crashed into the Canadian Northwest Territories. Canada filed a claim to charge them $3 million for compensation for cleanup costs and damages.

The Registration Convention of 1976 is the fourth treaty and has one central requirement: all countries must notify the United Nations of their launches in advance. This aims to increase transparency and reduce suspicions or any conflicts related to space. This includes a registration process where the country must provide the name of the launch state, the date and location of the launch, orbital parameters (including the path and altitude), a description of the launch's general functions, and ways to identify the asset in case there is a need to track where the object came from. This law applies to all states and includes all private sector launches, which are the responsibility of the state. This treaty complements the previous treaty (the Liability Convention) in that the registration process facilitates the better management of liability laws in the event of any damages occurring in space.

Lastly, the Moon Agreement, which was signed in 1984, is the agreement with the least amount of international cooperation, with only 18 countries ratifying it. The agreement states

that the Moon and its resources are for the benefit of all mankind. Resources on the Moon are not to be owned or used for profit without an international agreement. The promotion of international scientific cooperation on the Moon and the prohibition of the Moon from being used for military testing or weapon deployment are all aspects of the Moon Agreement. The Moon Agreement also calls for the establishment of an international governing body to manage the Moon's resources; however, this body has yet to be established, highlighting the ineffectiveness of this treaty.[33]

Although when all of these treaties come together, they form a cohesive web of solutions, several holes in these treaties render them ineffective in protecting the future of space. Several vital definitions are missing, such as ‘space weapon’, which leaves loopholes for modern technology that may not be considered a weapon but can still cause harm to other nations' space technology (ASAT missiles or Jammers). Additionally, it doesn't address the regulation of conventional weapons that are not of mass destruction. These weapons, such as anti-satellite weapons, have already been developed and proven effective; however, without proper legislation governing them, the effects will be felt not only by countries but also by civilians who rely on satellites for their safety. Due to the formation of numerous treaties under the United Nations, private sectors and companies aren’t directly bound by these treaties; however, the states are responsible for the companies, which can make ensuring the enforcement of the treaties difficult. Furthermore, the Liability Convention was signed before new mega constellations formed, so the treaty fails to address who has liability when collisions occur in pre-crowded orbits.

Delegates should work towards identifying and addressing areas of improvement in the existing treaties. Delegates also should keep in mind global cooperation, civilian safety, and

[33] UNOOSA. “Space Law Treaties and Principles.” Unoosa.org, 2019. https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties.html.

opportunities like space resource use. Delegates are encouraged to consider the potential expansion of space exploration in the future and how to manage these advancements.

Preventing an Outer Space Arms Race

A ‘space arms race’ refers to a period of intense competition among nations regarding the use and creation of new space technologies. An example similar to this is the Cold War, when the United States and the Soviet Union competed to develop the most advanced space technology. However, in the case of a contemporary space arms race, there is greater concern about the potential effects due to the increased number of space tools being utilized for military purposes. This is evident in the increasing budgets countries have allocated towards outer space. The United States has the largest space budget, reaching approximately $135 billion in 2024, a 10% increase from the 2023 budget.[34] The following countries that have large space budgets are China, Russia, and India.[35]

Space technology has already been developing at a fast rate, and it’s only going to improve. One weapon that has developed rapidly is the ASAT, or anti-satellite weapon. There are two categories of ASATs: kinetic and non-kinetic. The kinetic ASATs physically crash into satellites and can be ballistic missiles, kinetic kill vehicles, or other satellites. The second is non-kinetic ASATs, which employ non-physical attacks, such as cyberattacks, jamming, and space lasers. While these weapons are a good defense and attack method, they cause serious amounts of space debris to enter orbit. In 2007, China tested one of its ASATs on an old weather satellite, the Fengyun-1C; unfortunately, the test did not go as planned and left over 3,000 traceable pieces of space debris floating in orbit.[36] In total, four countries, including the United States, China, Russia, and India, have tested ASATs before, all of which have increased space

[34] Gorman, Douglas, and Douglas Gorman. “New Report Catalogs Military Capabilities in Orbit.” Payload, April 4, 2025. https://payloadspace.com/secure-world-foundation-catalogs-global-space-military-capabilities/.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Smith, Mark. “Anti-Satellite Weapons: History, Types and Purpose.” Space.com, August 10, 2022. https://www.space.com/anti-satellite-weapons-asats.

debris; most notably, China in 2007 and Russia in 2021, where a large field of debris was released in low Earth Orbit.

The United Nations currently has a space initiative, PAROS, or the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space, which aims to prevent the overall weaponization of Outer Space. It also seeks to ensure that space is used for peaceful causes and to prevent the deployment of weapons into space. Still, this is not a current treaty but more of a public political statement made by the United Nations that states that the Outer Space Treaty is not sufficient on its own for protecting the weaponization of space; however, that is the end goal.[37] Seeing as this treaty needs to be more effective, delegates should learn from past consequences of intense space weapons and prevent the recurrence of such events. Delegates should emphasize the crucial importance of transparency in the nation's weapon testing, as well as identifying areas of cooperation while safeguarding space assets, particularly in the context of dual-use technology.

[37] United Nations. "Group of Governmental Experts on Further Effective Measures for the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space – UNODA," n.d. https://disarmament.unoda.org/topics/outerspace/paros-gge/.

Proliferation of Space Debris

Space debris, or orbital debris, or space junk, "is defined as all non-functional artificial objects, including fragments and elements thereof, in Earth orbit or re-entering into Earth's atmosphere."[38] There is more human-made space debris present than natural meteoroid debris in orbit. Space debris is monitored and tracked by several organizations, including the United States Space Command, the European Space Agency, and the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity. These organizations can track the debris by routinely using ground-based radars that track and record any objects over five to 10 centimeters in low orbit and any objects that are 36,000 kilometers above the equator and larger than 0.3 to one meter. The cataloged objects can all be tracked down to their specific launch.

Since there have been more than 6,900 launches since the start of the space age and around 10,000 satellites put into orbit, there is an increasing amount of space debris resulting from launches.[39] As previously mentioned, ASAT testing has been a significant contributor to space debris, and theories have been proposed regarding the impact of these tests. In 1978, NASA scientist Donald Kessler theorized the consequences of using anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons in space. This is known as the Kessler Syndrome, which states that destroying satellites will create a debris field in space, potentially leading to collisions with other satellites and a chain reaction of destruction and debris. This theory illustrates and magnifies how space debris is a major threat to all future and current space assets.[40] Space debris also moves very quickly at around 18,000 miles per hour, which makes even the smallest particles extremely dangerous and

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[38] www.esa.int. "Space Debris FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions," April 2021. https://www.esa.int/Space_Safety/Space_Debris/Space_Debris_FAQ_Frequently_asked_questions.
[39] European Space Agency. "Space Environment Statistics." sdup.esoc.esa.int, March 31, 2025. https://sdup.esoc.esa.int/discosweb/statistics/.
[40] Kelvey, Jon . "Understanding the Misunderstood Kessler Syndrome | Space4." s4.arizona.edu, March 8, 2024. https://s4.arizona.edu/news/understanding-misunderstood-kessler-syndrome. These should be 10pt font

poses serious threats to satellites, spacecraft, and astronauts. Space tools that civilians depend on are vulnerable to space debris.[41]

There are three levels at which a satellite can orbit or space debris can be found in space. LEO (Low Earth Orbit), MEO (Medium Earth Orbit), and GEO (Geostationary Earth Orbit). Currently, LEO satellites are at the lowest altitude, typically between 100 to 1,200 miles high, and this space is becoming relatively crowded with more satellites entering the zone. As a result, LEO satellites are at high risk of collision or attack from space debris. As of May 2025, there are approximately 11,683 satellites in LEO out of the 22,500 total objects in orbit, showing the overpopulation of this region and the danger that it poses.[42] With there being more objects in this orbit level, there is a greater risk of collisions, which will only lead to more space debris. This is also an issue that has happened several times in the past; for example, in 2021, a part of a Zenit-2 rocket body collided with a Chinese military satellite (Yunhai-1 02), which caused it to be destroyed.[43]

A program that has been working to mitigate the environmental impact of space activities is ESA's Clean Space Initiative. This group has been promoting green satellite designs and is actively developing a mission to remove larger particles of debris from orbit. This mission, known as the ClearSpace-1 mission, will be the first ever to remove a satellite from space. ESA has also created educational resources to provide information on tracking debris and spreading awareness, promoting a superior approach to exploring all that space has to offer.

Delegates are encouraged to collaborate with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or other organizations to aid the growing issue of space debris. Delegates should seek solutions to

[41] NASA. "Space Debris." NASA. NASA, November 3, 2023. https://www.nasa.gov/headquarters/library/find/bibliographies/space-debris/.
[42] Butash, Tom. "Low-Earth Orbit Mega Constellations Reach Record Capacity." Aerospace America, December 2021. https://aerospaceamerica.aiaa.org/year-in-review/low-earth-orbit-megaconstellations-reach-record-capacity/.
[43] Expert. "Space Debris and Satellite Collision: What You Should Know." Editverse, September 9, 2024. https://editverse.com/space-debris-satellite-collision/.

protect space assets from space debris. In addition, delegates should look into cataloging debris and what the method is for doing so.

As space technology continues to advance at such a rapid pace, the DISEC committee must address the following issues: update currently dated international law, prevent an arms race that could occur, and address the rising threat of space debris. Historically, space exploration has been primarily dominated by countries such as the United States, Russia, and China. Still, now, as more nations and private sectors enter the domain, there is a risk of dominance, competition, and conflict. Additionally, military and civilian personnel are now relying on satellites for security, communication, and everyday needs, meaning that attacks in space could have detrimental effects on Earth. With this increased presence in space, the delegates should aim to deliberate on viable solutions to protect international peace and security.

Guiding Questions

- How can existing political rivalries on Earth be prevented from escalating into conflict in outer space?
- What challenges or benefits has your country experienced from the existing space treaties and agreements?
- How can the UN balance security concerns and scientific exploration in space?
- What role should private companies play in regulating space activity, and how can they be held accountable under space law?
- What steps can be taken to manage and reduce the risks posed by space debris?

Further Readings

1. United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs Paper on Space Law Treaties and Principles
   https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties.html
2. Understanding the Misunderstood Kessler Syndrome
   https://aerospaceamerica.aiaa.org/features/understanding-the-misunderstood-kessler-syndrome/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=rasa_io&utm_campaign=newsletter
3. Anti-Satellite Weapons: History, Types, and Purpose
   https://www.space.com/anti-satellite-weapons-asats
4. United Nations Paper on Further Measures for the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space
   https://disarmament.unoda.org/topics/outerspace/paros-gge/