

General Assembly First Committee: Disarmament and International Security

Welcome

Dear Delegates,

I am pleased to welcome you to Brown University Simulation of the United Nations 2010, and to Providence. My name is Kathleen Ottinger, and I will be the chair for DISEC this November.

Let me take a moment to introduce myself. I am a sophomore concentrating in Middle East Studies and History of Art and Architecture. I'm originally from New York, but I enjoy living in Providence, and I hope during the weekend you spend here you'll find your time spent outside of committee just as enjoyable as the time you spend debating. I was involved in Model U.N. for three years in high school, and have chaired several committees. I have attended BUSUN as a delegate, but this will be my first time experiencing it from the other side.

I have written this background guide to introduce you to the topics I have chosen for us to discuss. Those topics are Underwater Mines, the Establishment of a Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone in the Middle East, and the Role of Science and Technology in the Context of International Security and Development. Please keep in mind, however, that the background guide is exactly that: a guide. It should serve as a starting point for your research, not as a crutch. Not only is this guide far from all-inclusive, but it was also written several months in advance. The state of the world is in a constant state of motion and you should arm yourself with an arsenal of knowledge that is not only detailed but also contemporary, so that debate in committee will be as fruitful as

possible.

I look forward to meeting you all in November. Should you have any questions beforehand, feel free to email me at DISEC@busun.net.

Best regards,

Kathleen Ottinger
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Committee History

The General Assemblies are the primary policy-making bodies of the United Nations. DISEC, the First Committee, is responsible for dealing with agenda items relating to disarmament and international security questions. DISEC meets as a body to discuss these questions, and then makes recommendations to the Plenary based on their deliberations. In Plenary, they are then debated and voted upon and either adopted or abandoned.

The United Nations charter states that its purpose is to “maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace.” The Charter also goes on to say

DISEC does not have the power to initiate military action or pass a binding resolution. Although DISEC is concerned with issues of great importance such as weapons security, the handling of regional crises, and nuclear proliferation, any documents this committee passes cannot be enforced.

Although resolutions in our committee will be passed based on a formal vote, in past years, the General Assemblies have worked to pass resolutions after trying to achieve a consensus to strengthen support for these resolutions and establish a greater feeling of international cooperation. I will expect a similar spirit of cooperation in our committee.

Topic 1: Underwater Mines

Background

Early plans for sea mines date back to 14th century imperial China. These first mines were relatively simple, and floated on the surface of the water. As the centuries have worn on, naval mines have become significantly more sophisticated, although their function is still relatively simple and easy to understand: to lay undisturbed until enemy ships come into contact with them, at which point they are detonated.

In the 19th and early 20th century, naval mines were developed heavily by Russia in the Crimean War and the Russo-Japanese War. They were also employed by Confederate forces in the American Civil War. Naval mines did not enter extensive, widespread use until World War I, however, when mines were laid along ports and coasts and naval bases, by both the Allies and the Axis. They were also used in shipping lanes, mainly by Germany, to sink merchant vessels attempting to aid Britain. It is estimated that during WWI at least 235,000 underwater mines were laid.

New mine technology was used in WWII. Mines were developed that could be dropped from airplanes, and thus mines could now be dropped into enemy waters. (Before, mines had to be laid by hand.) Although they typically floated on the surface of the water, and thus were easy to sweep, it took time and

resources, and it often required the closing of harbors. Also, mines were created that could detect ships magnetically and therefore be set off at a distance, which, consequently, meant that ships did not have to hit them as they did with contact mines. They were more difficult to detect than their predecessors.

Mines have been used less frequently since WWII, although they are still used because of their cost-effectiveness and their flexibility. Although more sophisticated mines, such as torpedo mines which can target and pursue ships, can be very expensive, simple contact mines are easy and cheap to produce and thus a seemingly good resort for nations who are trying to defend themselves against nations who, in the realm of military technology, are far superior.

Current Situation

Today, the sale of sea mines is largely unregulated. Both friendly nations and third parties contribute to a growing threat of naval mine proliferation. Naval mines continue to prove one of the largest threats to a number of countries, because of their accessibility.

The deactivation and removal of mines is an expensive process. Most countries don't have the resources to do it themselves. Sometimes after being laid, mines can sink to the bottom of the sea floor and lay buried there, undetected and undisturbed for decades. Even now, decades later, the United States is uncovering mines laid during WWII. Most of the mines that the U.S. uncovers are found with dolphins, who are specially trained to detect mines underwater and mark them with a buoy on the surface. The dolphins, however, cannot deactivate the mines; this is a job left for the divers. The U.S. has also begun to employ unmanned vehicles to search for mines off the coast of Virginia, but these robots have trouble communicating underwater and have been

known to be picked up by fishing nets. Despite their flaws, these methods are the best at the international community's disposal when it comes to detecting and deactivating naval mines. Both of them, however, are very expensive.

Moreover, Protocol V of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) specifies in great detail the responsibility of nations to clear and remove all explosive remnants of war from the territory. If the territory no longer belongs to them, they must still provide "technical, financial, material or human resources assistance, bilaterally or through a mutually agreed third party, including... the United Nations." In addition, Protocol II specifies that all mines must be equipped with technology so that they can be remotely deactivated after the termination of an armed conflict. However, this does not mean that nations comply with these standards.

For example, in 1984 mines laid in the Suez Canal region damaged many British and U.S. ships passing through. The U.S. discovered Soviet-made mines that were suspected to have been laid by Libya. The U.S. helped to clear the area to avoid any further sinking of ships, but because there was even the slightest possibility Libya did not lay the mines, no international action was taken against them.

Naval mines achieved international attention in 1986 when international law concerning their use was brought into question and discussed in the ICJ. In the internal conflict between the Nicaraguan Government and the Contras, there was evidence that suggested the U.S. was heavily supporting the Contras in their fight against the Nicaraguan government. Part of their support was laying naval mines in Nicaragua's territorial waters. Based on the ICJ decision, the U.S. was found to have violated "customary international law not to violate the

sovereignty of another country" by laying its mines in Nicaraguan waters.

More recently, naval mines severely damaged US ships stationed in the Persian Gulf during the Gulf War. In the past few months, the sinking of a South Korean ship near the North Korean sea border was originally thought to have been sunk by a naval mine, although it was later discovered to have been sunk by a North Korean torpedo.

It is important to keep in mind that unlike land mines, naval mines have a record of harming (for the most part) only navy officers. This should be taken into account when discussing the subject.

Questions to Consider

1. Naval mines are still in prominent use throughout the international community. Is this acceptable? Why or why not?
2. Is the current international law on underwater mines sufficient? Why or why not? What would be more suitable?
3. Is it the international community's role to aid in cleaning up underwater mine fields? What action should be taken?
4. To what extent should countries be held accountable for mines laid in their waters, even if they are decades old?
5. What action should be taken if an undeclared minefield is discovered?

Topic 2: Establishment of a Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone in the Middle East

Background

The State of Israel was established on May 14, 1948, although there was conflict there long before Israel declared independence. The Arab-Israeli Conflict, however, is primarily a response to the creation of the state of Israel and the actions it has taken since asserting its

independence.

There are religious motivations on both sides. On the Israeli side, the Likud Party (which is now the leading party in the Israeli Knesset, or parliament) frequently uses the Biblical claim to the Land of Israel. This is supported by Christian Zionists, who also recognize the ancestral right of the Jews to the land. Muslims, however, also claim the land; they suggest that they too have an ancestral right to the land, and having also constructed many landmarks over Jewish holy sites, such as the Dome of the Rock, which marks the location of the Temple Mount.

There have been many armed conflicts in the region as a result of these religious contestations and political claims. Major wars have been fought in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982, to name a few, and recently the Gaza War marked another escalation in violence between Israel and the surrounding region. Each conflict gets bloodier and uglier as Israel develops more sophisticated technology and their opposition deploy more destructive weapons. It is easy to see how nuclear weapon capabilities, for Israel or any of the countries who challenge Israel's right to exist, could escalate the conflict to the point where the entire region could end up a vast wasteland of molten glass.

To prevent a possible nuclear war in the Middle East as states increase their nuclear energy capacities, this committee will explore establishing a nuclear-free-weapons-zone as a possibility, as well as what measures would need to be taken to meet the requirements of such a treaty.

Current Situation

Currently, the only known states to possess nuclear weapons are the five permanent members of the Security Council,

and India, Pakistan, North Korea possess the technology to detonate a nuclear device. It is strongly suspected, however, that Israel does possess nuclear weapons of its own, although Israel practices a policy of "nuclear ambiguity," in which it never admits to possessing nuclear weapons but never directly denies having them. Based on current estimates, Israel is believed to possess between 75 and 400 nuclear warheads. This number is slight in comparison to the number of warheads the P5 possess, but it is still a formidable stockpile.

The nations of the Arab League have zero nuclear weapons. Zero, against 75. In addition, Israel has in the past bordered on infringing international law, especially in its use of white phosphorus in the Gaza conflict. Beside Israel, who has all but made official that it has the capacity to produce and deploy nuclear weapons, one could begin to understand how nations like Iran may pursue a nuclear program. In the state they are now, should a massive conflict (one that causes the previous ones to pale in comparison of severity) erupt in the Middle East, the Arab nations would not stand a chance. When one takes into consideration that the United States has often supported Israel and sometimes intervened on its behalf, the fear of even the slightest possibility of nuclear annihilation must be terrifying.

Iran is probably the closest country to achieving the capacity to build nuclear weapons outside of Israel. Although not a part of the Arab League, with the majority of its population being not Arab, but Persian, Iran has been made its opinion widely known in regards to Israel's legitimacy. Whether he stated that Israel must be "wiped off the map" or that the Israeli regime must "vanish from the page of time," Iran poses a significant threat to Israel's security, along with the conglomerate of other Arab states that oppose it.

A Nuclear-Weapons Free Zone is defined by the U.N. as “any zone... which any group of states... has established by virtue of a treaty or convention whereby the statute of total absence of nuclear weapons to which the zone will be subject.” They are created as a confidence-building measure and intended to ease tensions and create more security between nations. As good of a solution as this might seem, there are many steps in the way of creating a NWFZ in the Middle East. Firstly and probably most prominently, Israel has not yet signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which suggests a certain unwillingness to cooperate in creating a nuclear weapons free environment. Secondly, many attempts at creating treaties and conventions between the countries in the Middle East to end the conflict, and even minor conflicts seem to be difficult to solve, with both sides unwilling to make certain basic concessions required to make a compromise.

We must remind cognizant of the deep rooted resentments involved in this conflict moving forward. These countries have a long history of violence between them and in order to move forward positively we must keep this in mind.

Questions to Consider

1. Is a NWFZ a good idea for the Middle East?
2. What barriers currently exist to creating a NWFZ, essentially a contract, between conflicting nations? What can DISEC do to remove these barriers?
3. If a NWFZ is created, how can the area maintain nuclear power facilities without breaching the trust of other parties in the treaty?

Topic 3: The Role of Science and Technology in the Context of International Security and Disarmament

Background

Each great conflict has been accompanied by a surge in scientific and technological development. Many new technologies would not have been developed, since the ideas that created them would have had insufficient funding if they weren't sponsored by the military.

As far back as the 700 CE, we can trace technological developments to a militaristic intent. Innovations in architecture and fortification were used in the building of the Great Wall of China. Techniques and precision learned by cannon makers in the Middle Ages was the same kind of technique needed for building steam-powered engines and other machines. The radio became significantly more reliable after it was developed to direct aircraft during WWI. Designs for early U.S. space shuttles were based on German bombers.

A majority of the appliances used in day-to-day life were originally military technologies. If there is something that was invented that was not a direct result of technological advancements for the military, it typically owes some of its parts, or the principals of how it works, to some preceding technology that came from the military. Prosthetic limbs, which are increasingly becoming more adaptive and responsive, were originally created for soldiers injured during war. Each conflict that is created in the world is usually accompanied by a spike in technological development, and many of those military technologies, after the war is over, have civilian applications. They can be sold to commercial companies who then market them to civilians. A lot of the functions of virtual training technologies has trickled down into the video game market.

However, it is important to keep in mind that science and technology also has a more menacing purpose. WWI and WWII saw many

great technological advancements, but it also saw the introduction of submarines, mustard gas, and the atomic bomb.

Even technology that can be used for peaceful purposes can sometimes be weaponized. Nuclear reactors used for power, for example, can be used to enrich uranium to the level necessary to create a nuclear weapon.

Current Situation

As technology becomes increasingly advanced, and keeping in mind most technologies grow out of military developments, there are obvious threats that arise to international security. There is obviously a problem of escalation: when one side creates tanks that can withstand even the strongest of attacks (such as the Israeli Golan , which can withstand even explosively formed penetrators, making it the first and only tank on the market to be able to do so) their enemies must become more creative, to create new weapons to penetrate the armor of that tank.

Additionally, The dawn of the twenty-first century has seen the power of pathogens, and the damage they can wreak among a populace. The most prominent example is the outbreak of H1N1. With the rate technology is rapidly developing, it is not out of the question to be concerned about someone manufacturing a formidable virus to be weaponized.

Also, with outer space beginning to be explored more thoroughly, there is the ever-present threat of the weaponization of space. For example, international concerns were raised when China shot down one of its weather satellites with a ballistic missile launched from space in January of 2007. China insisted that the demonstration was intended as a test, and its intents were nothing but peaceful, but the capability in itself continues to pose concerns

for the international community.

In a more general sense, science is also pushing certain elements of war into a direction that doesn't involve the physical presence of soldiers. Unmanned aircraft can now be used for reconnaissance missions and bombings. U.S. companies have produced automated sentry guns. Robot patrol vehicles have also been manufactured.

An eventual transition to automated warfare obvious has its appeals, one of which is there would be virtually no loss of life in battles. However, the idea also poses a lot of problems. Primarily, when nations first develop more sophisticated automated weaponry and perhaps even a robot infantry, there is the potential for war to become much more bloody, much more violent. Robot soldiers have the advantage of not getting tired, and not getting killed, but they also do not possess a sense of humanity. In incidences where advanced robots begin to be allowed to make certain autonomous decisions regarding warfare, mistakes will obviously probably be made. Additionally, as robots become more autonomous, there is always the threat of them becoming a danger to their superiors.

All of this may seem like science fiction, but as science advances these are questions we must begin to consider seriously. The committee will investigate what protocol may be necessary to dictate what technologies are appropriate or necessary, and in what instances they may be used.

Questions to Consider

1. Scientific and technological develops can have positive and negative impacts. How can we encourage nations to use their technology for peaceful purposes?
2. How should future 'ambiguous

technologies' such as nuclear power be treated and/or regulated?

3. How can we prevent situations of asymmetrical warfare as some nations leap far ahead of others in the realm of technology?