MIDWEST MODEL UNITED NATIONS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY FIRST COMMITTEE

TOPIC GUIDE

Topic Guides are prepared by MMUN volunteer staff and are meant to provide basic background information on each of the committees and the topics on their agenda. Delegates should conduct outside research in order to fully prepare for negotiations in committee.

Midwest Model United Nations, Inc.
PO Box 104522
Jefferson City, MO 65110

MIDWEST MODEL UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly First Committee

Committee Mandate

In 1945, the *Charter of the United Nations* established the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), which is the main deliberative body and one of the principal organs of the United Nations.[1] The UNGA is comprised of all 193 Member States of the United Nations and serves as a high-level platform for diplomacy. The UNGA presents an opportunity to all Member States to create and adopt non-binding resolutions which lay out policies or international norms on certain topics. The General Assembly is broken into 6 subsidiary committees.

The General Assembly First Committee is the Disarmament and International Security committee of the UNGA. The General Assembly First Committee addresses issues of disarmament and threats to international peace and security.[2] While the UN Security Council focuses on specific threats or conflicts, the General Assembly First Committee addresses general disarmament issues and security concerns on a high level. The General Assembly First Committee is also the only committee that keeps verbatim records of its proceedings in order to keep track of its political and highly contentious work.[3]

Membership

As part of a plenary committee of the United Nations, the General Assembly First Committee is comprised of all UN Member States. It's currently chaired by H.E. Ion Jinga of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The UNGA operates on the notion of sovereign equality, which guarantees all Members a single, equal vote.[4] No states receive a special veto or a weighted vote.[5] Some Member States lack adequate staff to have representatives at every subsidiary committee sessions or during informal debates. Typically, more delegates review and vote on draft resolutions during the General Assembly Plenary sessions than during a meeting of a subsidiary General Assembly committee.[6]

Reporting

The General Assembly First Committee has special relationships with the UN Disarmament Commission and the Conference on Disarmament. Both of these entities report to the UNGA annually. While in session, delegates of this committee discuss and debate a topic to develop a working paper, which can then be adopted as a draft resolution by a simple majority vote of the committee. Draft resolutions from the General Assembly First Committee and, indeed, all 6 of the General Assembly subsidiary committees, are passed on to the General Assembly Plenary for

[1] United Nations Conference on International Organization, *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945.
[2] United Nations General Assembly, "Disarmament and International Security (First Committee)," n.d
[3] Ibid.
[4] United Nations Conference on International Organization, *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945.
[5] Ibid.
[6] United Nations General Assembly, "Disarmament and International Security (First Committee)," n.d

a second vote and, ultimately, adoption via majority vote.[7] Any resolution adopted by the General Assembly is a representation of the will of the international community.

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[7] United Nations General Assembly, "Disarmament and International Security (First Committee)," n.d

MIDWEST MODEL UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly First Committee

Topic A: The Role of Natural Resources in Armed Conflict

Introduction

"All wars are destructive — to people, to countries and to the environment."

- Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan

Traditionally, the international community has measured the devastating consequences of armed conflict through human casualties, displaced populations, human rights violations, and the destruction of critical infrastructure. However, the natural environment and its resources represent a less visible, but equally critical, dimension of these hostilities.[1] The environment is consequently degraded as a casualty itself or even a tactic of war, while the pursuit, control, and exploitation of natural resources frequently serve as the underlying catalyst or financing mechanism for protracted violence.[2] These concerns will threaten the health and stability of our home for the coming generations.[3]

Data gathered by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) indicates that over the last sixty years, at least 40 percent of all intrastate conflicts have possessed a demonstrable link to the exploitation of natural resources.[4] Furthermore, since 1990, at least 18 violent conflicts have been directly fueled or sustained by the extraction and exploitation of natural wealth.[5] This situation operates as a feedback loop: non-State armed groups and rogue actors illicitly extract and trade high value commodities such as timber, diamonds, gold, and critical minerals to generate immediate revenue. This capital is directly funneled into the black-market procurement of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), heavy munitions, and tactical equipment.[6] Armed with firepower, these groups expand their territorial control over resource rich areas, enabling continued extraction, further illicit trade, and continuous rearmament. This cycle converts wealth directly into weapons proliferation, driving local arms races, unilaterally bypassing international sanctions, and embedding violence into the given region. [7]

Simultaneously, the physical environment suffers devastating ruin during active hostilities. From landmine contamination and deforestation to the deliberate

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[1] United Nations. "How conflict impacts our environment". United Nations Peace and Security. 2024.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] United Nations Environment Programme. "From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment". United Nations. 2009.
[5] Ibid.
[6] United Nations Office to the African Union. "Small Arms and Light Weapons." United Nations. September 5. 2023.
[7] United Nations Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action. "Extractive Industries and Conflict". Toolkit and Guidance for Preventing and Managing Land and Natural Resources Conflict. United Nations. 2012.

destruction of water systems and oil refineries, the natural environment is frequently weaponized to deprive populations of basic needs or to deny strategic terrain to opposing forces.[8]

This bridges the gap between environmental security and non-proliferation. Conventional disarmament strategies cannot succeed if the shadow economies funding weapons flows remain intact.[9] To further halt illicit arms flows and prevent violent conflict, the General Assembly First Committee (GA1) can address how natural resources act as the primary currency for non-State militarization and establish multilateral mechanisms that break the link between resource exploitation, environmental destruction, and arms proliferation.[10]

Background

Historically, GA1 addressed armed conflict primarily through the lens of maintaining international peace and security, combatting illicit arms flows, and withholding the financing of armed groups. However, recognizing that resource wealth directly intersects with weak governance and weapons proliferation, the UN has expanded its focus.[11]

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the United Nations (UN) system began systematically confronting the link between natural resources and violent conflict. Recognizing that reactionary measures were insufficient, the international community moved toward preventative, institutional frameworks.[12] A major milestone in this institutional evolution occurred in 2012 when the United Nations Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action, in partnership with the European Union (EU), published its landmark *Toolkit and Guidance for Preventing and Managing Land and Natural Resources Conflict*.[13] Specifically, its guidance to identify early-warning indicators of resource driven tension. Simultaneously, international norms evolved to hold commercial and state actors accountable for their roles in resource extraction during armed instability. Global standards, such as the *UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights,* established that corporate supply chains must not inadvertently fund non-State armed groups or bypass national sovereignty.[14]

Conflict Commodities

[8] United Nations Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action. “Extractive Industries and Conflict”. Toolkit and Guidance for Preventing and Managing Land and Natural Resources Conflict. United Nations. 2012.
[9] United Nations Human Rights Council. “Human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises”. Resolution A/HRC/RES/17/4. United Nations. 2011.
[10] United Nations. “General Assembly of the United Nations.”
[11] United Nations Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action. “Extractive Industries and Conflict”. Toolkit and Guidance for Preventing and Managing Land and Natural Resources Conflict. United Nations. 2012.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] United Nations Human Rights Council. “Human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises”. Resolution A/HRC/RES/17/4. United Nations. 2011.

During the Second Congo War the UN Security Council (UNSC) first confronted the continual threat of natural commodities in funding private militias. The UNSC adopted landmark decisions including *S/RES/1291* (2000), which expanded peacekeeping monitoring around key extraction zones, and S/RES/1457 (2003), which explicitly condemned the illegal exploitation of natural wealth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.[15,16] These resolutions warned that the illicit extraction of materials directly funded private armed groups, fueled SALW proliferation, and prolonged regional hostilities. In response, multilateral tracking frameworks were established, most notably the certification scheme created by the General Assembly to eliminate conflict diamonds from global commerce.[17]

Current Situation

The General Assembly First Committee (GA1) addresses the exploitation of natural resources as an immediate threat to international peace and security.[18] Rather than treating environmental damage and illegal commodity flows as isolated issues, the most modern frameworks recognize that natural resource exploitation directly destabilizes fragile regions and funds armed violence.[19] UN bodies and regional partners currently work to cut off illicit revenue pipelines while establishing legal safety nets for vulnerable ecosystems throughout the theatre of combat. The UNEP, particularly through its Disaster and Conflicts Branch, conducts post conflict environmental assessments and identifies natural resource risks that could re-ignite hostilities.[20]

Development of Protection of the Environment in Armed Conflicts (PERAC) Principles

Parallel to economic controls, the UN has increasingly codified legal protections for the physical environment during active warfare. Although early agreements, including the 1976 *Environmental Modification Convention* and *Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions*, sought to prohibit the use of widespread environmental destruction as a weapon of war, enforcing these protections in non-international conflicts remained a challenge.[21] To establish comprehensive legal standards across all stages of conflict, the International Law Commission (ILC) drafted the *Principles on the Protection of the Environment in Relation to Armed Conflicts* (PERAC).[22] The General Assembly formally commended these principles to Member States in

[15] United Nations Security Council. “Resolution 1291 (2000)”. Resolution S/RES/1291(2000). United Nations. 2000.
[16] United Nations Security Council. “Resolution 1457 (2003)”. Resolution S/RES/1457(2003). United Nations. 2003.
[17] United Nations General Assembly. “Role of diamonds in fueling armed conflict: breaking the link between the illicit transaction of rough diamonds and armed conflict as a contribution to prevention and settlement of conflicts”. Resolution A/RES/55/56. United Nations. 2000.
[18] United Nations Environment Programme. “Disasters and Conflicts Programme Activity Report”. UNEP, Nairobi. 2023.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] United Nations General Assembly. “Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Techniques”. Resolution A/RES/31/72 (1976). United Nations. 1976
[22] United Nations International Law Commission. “Draft principles on protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts”. Report of the International Law Commission, Seventy-third Session, A/77/10, chap. V. United Nations. 2022.

A/RES/77/104 and reaffirmed them in A/RES/80/158.[23,24] Furthermore, the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and UNEP have operated with these principles by integrating environmental management protocols directly into UN peacekeeping operations to secure vulnerable natural assets and support post-conflict stabilization.[25]

Illicit Extraction and Financing Network Operations

The illicit commodity trade, which may include mining, timber extraction, oil shipments, and a multitude of other industries, operates through sophisticated financial and logistical pipelines that bypass conventional State oversight.[26] Non-State actors (NSA) and other armed groups generate substantial revenue by directly controlling extraction sites and checkpoints therein, meaning that such operations often serve as a primary financial engine for non-State armed groups acquiring weaponry and sustaining operations. These networks capitalize on weak territorial control and informal trade corridors to blend illegal goods into global supply chains.[27]

Once natural resources are harvested, NSAs and other groups rely on informal transport routes and localized intrastate schemes to move materials across largely open borders through the use of bribes and other border vulnerabilities.[28] Rather than selling directly on formal international markets, these actors utilize local intermediaries and shell entities to obscure the origin of the commodities. High value materials such as gold, timber, and crude oil possess high liquidity, allowing NSAs to convert physical commodities into cash or exchange them directly for arms and military supplies.[29]

The Disaster and Conflicts Branch of UNEP emphasizes that these illegal revenue streams incentivize armed groups to maintain control over rural territories, frustrating peacekeeping efforts and threatening long-term stabilization.[30] Moreover, UN Panel of Experts reports consistently show that when illicit resources enter formal markets, they reduce legitimate government tax revenues and provide NSAs with the capital necessary to sustain prolonged armed campaigns.[31]

Weaponization of Natural Infrastructure, SDGs, Resource Scarcity

The environment itself can become a target during armed conflict, with natural resources and infrastructure deliberately damaged to achieve military objectives.

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[23] United Nations General Assembly. “Protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts”. Resolution A/RES/77/104. United Nations. 2022.
[24] United Nations General Assembly. “Protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts”. Resolution A/RES/80/158. United Nations. 2025.
[25] United Nations Department of Operational Support. “The Way Forward: Environment Strategy for Peace Operations 2023-2030 Responsibility, Ambition, Legacy”. DOS. 2023.
[26] United Nations Secretary General. “Secretary-General's remarks to the Security Council - on Natural Resource Governance”. United Nations. 2026.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] United Nations Security Council. “Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo”. Document S/2023/431. United Nations. 2023.
[31] Ibid.

Combatants increasingly weaponize access to arable land, hydroelectric dams, and potable water reservoirs to exert coercive control over civilian populations and degrade enemy logistics.[32] This calculated targeting violates established tenets of international humanitarian law, particularly *Article 54* and *Article 56 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions*, which strictly prohibit the destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population and the targeting of works containing dangerous forces.[33] Expanding upon this legal framework, the Security Council adopted S/RES/2417 (2018), which unequivocally condemns the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare and highlights the direct correlation between the destruction of civilian infrastructure and widespread acute food insecurity.[34]

Such hostilities fundamentally undermine the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. The deliberate and focused degradation of natural assets directly precipitates severe reversals in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 15 (Life on Land), while the ensuing instability fractures the institutional capacities required to achieve SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).[35] Concurrently, environmental degradation and resource scarcity act as threat multipliers. As climate accelerates in terms of desertification and shrinks viable water basins, local competition over diminishing resources routinely escalates into localized violence, which non-State armed groups actively exploit for recruitment and expansion.[36] UNEP repeatedly emphasizes that the center of resource scarcity, environmental vulnerabilities, and illicit extraction creates a self-perpetuating cycle of conflict that outpaces the capabilities of traditional peacekeeping interventions.[37]

Human rights, displacement socioeconomic impact, International Outcry

These localized economies connected to illicit natural resource extraction are demonstrably linked to human rights violations.[38] These territories uniformly dominated by the described informal control frequently exhibit forced labor, sexual and gender-based violence, and the targeted expulsion of indigenous populations.[39] Though in a more narrow scope, these situations cause massive population movements and displacements, as monitored by recent assessments by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) confirm that conflict intertwined with environmental destruction creating acute humanitarian crises that overwhelm communities.[40]

Economically, these deeply-entrenched, illicit extraction networks entirely hollow out and deprive existing formal sectors via participation in the higher paying

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[32] Center of Excellence for Stability Police Units. “Weaponization of Natural Resources”. CoESPU. 2024.
[33] International Committee of the Red Cross. “Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions”. ICRC. 1977.
[34] United Nations Security Council. “Protection of civilians in armed conflict”. Resolution S/RES/2417. United Nations. 2018.
[35] United Nations General Assembly. “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. Resolution A/RES/70/1. United Nations. 2015.
[36] Ibid.
[37] United Nations Environment Programme. “Disasters and Conflicts Programme Activity Report”. UNEP, Nairobi. 2023.
[38] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “Mid-Year Trends 2025”. UNHCR. 2025.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

extraction-based economies supported by NSAs.[41] Unregulated and unmonitored operations can cause significant harm within areas controlled by non-state actors. For example, unregulated mining can release toxic runoff into surrounding communities, contaminating water supplies, while unmonitored timber operations can accelerate deforestation and contribute to severe degradation of soil quality.[42] Regardless of the specific sector, this innately prevents post-conflict communities from returning to their former, traditional styles of agriculture and ways of life.[43] In turn these complications have enabled an international outcry to more properly regulate international supply chains. The Human Rights Council formally endorsed the *UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*, establishing a baseline for corporate responsibility and State duty to prevent human rights abuses within global extraction networks.[44]

Future Outlook

As climate change, conflict, and environmental degradation place increasing pressure on existing governance systems, effective resource governance and transparent supply chains remain important to international peace and security. Strengthening oversight of extractive industries and limiting the trade of illicitly sourced goods may help reduce the economic incentives that sustain armed actors and conflict-affected authorities. The effectiveness of current and future policies will depend on their ability to balance environmental protection, economic stability, and local community needs while supporting long-term conflict prevention.[45] The traditional goal of conflict prevention faces unprecedented strain when considering modern climate disruptions and the global movement toward a less carbon-reliant energy sector. Anticipating future security vulnerabilities requires moving beyond reactive humanitarian and regulatory responses, demanding instead that multilateral frameworks proactively integrate climate resilience and supply-chain integrity into the core mandates of conflict prevention and disarmament.[46]

The global transition toward carbon-neutral economies introduces a complex dynamic for international security: the infrastructure required for green energy is highly dependent on the intensive extraction, need, and desire of critical energy transition minerals. A significant concentration of these unexploited reserves lies within fragile states and conflict riddled regions.[47] The accelerating demand for these commodities risks triggering a new generation of resource driven conflicts, wherein the imperative to secure supply chains supersedes local environmental safeguards and human rights protections. To prevent the green initiative and transition from replicating historical patterns of exploitation, the global community must decouple clean energy development from localized violence and ecological degradation.[48]

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[41] United Nations Human Rights Council. “Human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises”. Resolution A/HRC/RES/17/4. United Nations. 2011.
[42] United Nations Human Rights Council. “Human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises”. Resolution A/HRC/RES/17/4. United Nations. 2011.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] United Nations Department of Operational Support. “The Way Forward: Environment Strategy for Peace Operations 2023-2030 Responsibility, Ambition, Legacy”. DOS. 2023.
[46] United Nations. “Security Council debrief: Race for critical minerals intensifies amidst warnings of conflict”. UN News. 2026.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

Focus Questions

- What international disarmament and accountability mechanisms can the First Committee establish to deter State and non-State actors from the intentional destruction or weaponization of critical natural infrastructure during active hostilities?

- As global demand for critical minerals rises, what multilateral security frameworks must be developed to prevent resource-rich vulnerable States from becoming sites of proxy warfare or localized armed instability?

- How can international arms control frameworks and monitoring mechanisms be updated to integrate natural resource tracking, thereby severing the financial pipelines used by non-State actors to acquire small arms, light weapons and further watch total supply chain morality?

- How should the General Assembly First Committee adapt its traditional disarmament and conflict prevention understandings to address ecological degradation as a cause (and byproduct of) for armed conflict?

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https://mptf.undp.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024-08/csm_2023_progress_report.pdf

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MIDWEST MODEL UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly First Committee

Topic B: Disarmament, Non-Proliferation, and International Security

Introduction

"The world is over-armed and peace is under-funded."

- Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

First formally addressed by the General Assembly in resolution A/RES/43/77 A in 1988, the role of science and technology in international security has become increasingly prominent amid rapid technological change.[1,2] Science and technology are directly connected to militarism, with advances in munitions technologies, especially nuclear weaponry, of high interest throughout much of the 20th century.[3] Growth in logistics and transport technologies increased the reach and responsiveness of now global militaries while improvements in computing technologies opened an entire new dimension for potential conflict.[4] At the same time, scientific progress has also allowed international agencies to respond to those pressing arms concerns. Computing technology has improved weapons tracking capabilities, and expanding observational technologies make it more difficult for individuals to arm themselves without notice.[5] New options in biotechnology prompt more discussion of the consequences of their use.[6] Perhaps the most attention-grabbing new technologies are related to the rapid growth of artificial intelligence (AI) research.[7] Whatever the scientific advancement, it is the onus of the General Assembly First Committee to incorporate these burgeoning tools to create a world where disarmament is a priority and the goals outlined in the *United Nations Charter* are preserved.[8]

Background

Since the end of the Second World War, disarmament and non-proliferation have remained central pillars of international peace and security.[9] The unprecedented destruction caused by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945

[1] United Nations General Assembly. "SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY". United Nations. A/RES/43/77. 1988.
[2] United Nations. (1975). *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1971* (Vol. 25). Office of Public Information, United Nations.
[3] United Nations General Assembly. "SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY". United Nations. A/RES/43/77. 1988.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] United Nations General Assembly. *First Committee: Disarmament and international security*. United Nations. (n.d.)
[7] Ibid.
[8] United Nations General Assembly. *First Committee: Disarmament and international security*. United Nations. (n.d.)
[9] United Nations. (1945). *Charter of the United Nations.*

demonstrated the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), in particular nuclear weapons, prompting the international community to pursue measures aimed at preventing future related global conflicts.[10] With technological advancements continuing through the Cold War, the rapid expansion of nuclear arsenals and the further development, testing, and use of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons and devices, along with increasingly sophisticated conventional weapons highlighted the need for international cooperation to reduce the risks posed by increasingly destructive military capabilities.[11] The United Nations has played a leading role in advancing global disarmament efforts since its founding in 1945.[12] *Article 26* of the *Charter of the United Nations*, outlining the Security Council's responsibilities, tasks the Security Council with promoting the regulation of armaments, while the General Assembly serves as the primary forum for the discussion of disarmament and international security issues through the First Committee.[13]

In cooperation with organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the United Nations (UN) has aided in the establishment of legal frameworks and verification mechanisms designed to reduce the risk of armed conflict and limit the spread of WMDs.[14] One of the most significant milestones in international nonproliferation was the adoption of the *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)* in 1968, which entered into force in 1970.[15] Founded on three interconnected pillars, the NPT addresses the prevention of the spread of nuclear weapons, the promotion of peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and the pursuit of nuclear disarmament.[16] With a near-universal membership of 191 States, today the NPT remains the cornerstone of the global nuclear nonproliferation regime.[17] Additional agreements, including the *Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)*, the *Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)*, and the *Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)*, the *Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)* along with regional Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone treaties, have strengthened international norms against the development, testing, and use of WMDs.[18] However, significant challenges remain in today's fractured geopolitical climate. Multiple nuclear-armed States remain at odds with the NPT, while North Korea withdrew from the treaty in 2003 and has continued to expand its nuclear weapons program.[19]

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[10] Atomic Heritage Foundation. (n.d.). *J. Robert Oppenheimer.* National Museum of Nuclear Science & History.
[11] Arms Control Association. (2025, January). *Nuclear Weapons: Who Has What at a Glance.*
[12] United Nations. (1945). *Charter of the United Nations.*
[13] Ibid.
[14] International Atomic Energy Agency. (N.d.). *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).*
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization Preparatory Commission. (N.d.). *The Treaty*
[19] Arms Control Association. (2025, January). *Nuclear Weapons: Who Has What at a Glance.*

Current challenges include the modernization of nuclear arsenals by major powers such as the United States, the Russian Federation, and China, geopolitical tensions, regional unrest, and declining confidence in arms control agreements complicating efforts toward global disarmament.[20] Simultaneously, emerging technologies such as AI and lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS), along with advancing dual-use technologies and products, are transforming the international security landscape and raise new questions about the adaptation of existing legal frameworks to address these emerging technologies.[21]

Current Situation

Growing competition among major powers and the prospect of a new multipolar world presents a significant challenge to the international disarmament and nonproliferation regime. Rising geopolitical tensions such as in the Middle East, South China Sea, and South Asia, the declining trust among Member States, increasing military expenditures, and technological competition especially in the realm of AI, have contributed to concerns about renewed arms races and the potential for miscalculation or escalation. The UN has warned that growing mistrust and geopolitical division are weakening international security, all while weapons are becoming increasingly sophisticated and emerging technologies are developing faster than governance systems can respond. Laws and regulations, especially at the international level, develop very slowly, as reliance upon multilateral collaboration is vital. As geopolitical competition continues, Member States may consider how confidence-building measures, strategic dialogue, risk-reduction mechanisms, and arms-control agreements can prevent competition from developing into destabilizing arms races.[22]

Many contemporary technologies have become important components of military capabilities, raising questions about whether existing arms-control and non-proliferation frameworks have become outdated. Emerging technologies such as AI, drones, cyber capabilities, autonomous systems, and advanced biotechnology raise concerns regarding whether existing agreements and institutions are sufficiently adaptable to contemporary security challenges. Modernizing arms-control does not necessarily require replacing existing treaties, but established agreements may be strengthened through updated implementation mechanisms, measures of transparency, confidence-building measures, improved verification through neutral third parties, and regular assessments of scientific and technological

[20] Kulesa, Ł. (2023). *Reinventing Nuclear Disarmament and Nonproliferation as Cooperative Endeavors.* Council on Foreign Relations.
[21] Horowitz, M. C., Scharre, P., & Velez-Green, A. (2019). *A Stable Nuclear Future? The Impact of Autonomous Systems and Artificial Intelligence.* arXiv.
[22] United Nations. (2026, February 23). *Secretary-General's remarks to the Conference on Disarmament.*

developments.[23] Member States must balance measures intended to protect international security with the need to preserve peaceful scientific research and technological progress.[24]

Rapid technological developments in today's digital age may create new proliferation risks, as outlined above, but they can also provide new tools for strengthening arms-control verification and treaty implementation. Traditional verification has relied on mechanisms such as on-site inspections, international declarations, monitoring relevant equipment, and collaborating through international organizations. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence may supplement these methods by improving the ability to collect, process, and analyze information rapidly. Artificial intelligence and machine learning, for example, can assist analysts in examining large quantities of satellite imagery, open-source information, sensor data, or other records relevant to treaty implementation. These technologies can aid in improving the identification of suspicious activities, support inspectors in analyzing large and complex data sets, and fortifying the ability of international organizations to verify information on weapons development. International organizations are already exploring these applications. The OPCW, for example, has examined how artificial intelligence could contribute to implementation of the *CWC*.[25] Potential applications include chemical forensics, document analysis, identification of emerging threats, and analysis of open source information concerning alleged chemical weapons use.[26]

Biological Weapons and Emerging Technologies

The *Biological Weapons Convention (BWC*), originally entered into force in 1975 as the first multilateral treaty categorically banning a class of weapons.[27] This multilateral treaty prohibits the development, stockpiling, production, or transfer of biological agents and toxins, which have no justification for protective or peaceful purposes. This treaty also bans the development of weapons, equipment, or delivery systems to distribute such agents or toxins. Compliance issues are resolved bilaterally or multilaterally with complaints submitted to the United Nations Security Council, should there be a suspicion of a violation of the treaty.[28] One major flaw is that there is no implementation body of the BWC, which allows for potential ongoing violations.[29] A Review Conference is generally held every five years to assess the

[23] Stockholm Initiative for Nuclear Disarmament. (2025, April 25). *Navigating the potential impact of emerging technologies on nuclear disarmament, arms control, non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear energy and technology* (NPT/CONF.2026/PC.III/WP.35). United Nations.
[24] United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. (n.d.). *Military confidence-building measures*. United Nations.
[25] Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. (2024, July 8). *OPCW launches €260,000 artificial intelligence research challenge.*
[26] Ibid.
[27] Nuclear Threat Initiative. (n.d.). *Biological Weapons Convention (BWC).*
[28] Nuclear Threat Initiative. (n.d.). *Biological Weapons Convention (BWC).*
[29] Nuclear Threat Initiative. (n.d.). *Biological Weapons Convention (BWC).*

Convention's implementation and establish confidence-building measures.[30] However, this may not be often enough with the rapid development of technology in today's digital age, with the use of AI to create blueprints for bioweapons a known concern, which is not discussed in the BWC. This is considered a major shortcoming, with Member States and non-State actors alike potentially using AI to obtain instructions, create supply chains, and proliferate the spread of information relating to the development of biological weapons.[31]

Bioterrorism is the intentional distribution of bacteria, viruses, fungi, or toxins to cause harm, panic, or death in people, animals, or crops[32]. Biological agents used in biological attacks are often found in nature but can be modified to spread more easily or resist medical treatments.[33] Common biological agents of concern include anthrax (*Bacillus anthracis*), which forms resilient spores that can be hidden in powders or sprays and cause severe illness, smallpox (*Variola major*), which is a contagious virus with high transmission rates that spreads directly between people, plague (*Yersinia pestis*), which is a severe bacterial infection transmitted via droplets or fleas, or botulinum toxin, a lethal natural poison that paralyzes muscles.[34]

Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)

Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) have become a significant issue in international discussions concerning emerging military technologies.[35] Although there is no universally accepted definition of LAWS, debates generally concern weapons systems capable of performing certain functions, including identifying, selecting, or engaging targets, with varying degrees of human involvement.[36] The increasing autonomy of weapons systems raises legal, ethical, and security questions concerning human control, accountability, compliance with international humanitarian law. There is a current lack of consensus between Member States over whether existing international law is sufficient to govern these technologies or whether additional international rules, restrictions, or legally binding instruments are necessary.[37] The accessibility and proliferation of autonomous and AI-enabled military technologies may also affect international stability. Advanced systems that were previously available primarily to major military powers may become accessible to a wider range of Member States and non-State actors.[38]

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[30] Nuclear Threat Initiative. (n.d.). *Biological Weapons Convention (BWC).*
[31] Ibid.
[32] World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Biological weapons*.
[33] Arizona Emergency Information Network. (n.d.). *Bioterrorism.*
[34] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2026, February 4). *Bioterrorism and anthrax: The threat.*
[35] Hwang, E. (2025, January 30). *Lethal autonomous weapons: The next frontier in international security and arms control.* Stanford International Policy Review, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University.
[36] Hwang, E. (2025, January 30). *Lethal autonomous weapons: The next frontier in international security and arms control.* Stanford International Policy Review, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Hwang, E. (2025, January 30). *Lethal autonomous weapons: The next frontier in international security and arms control.* Stanford International Policy Review, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University

Conventional Weapons and Emerging Threats

The proliferation of advanced conventional weapons (ACW) poses a serious threat to international peace and security. A growing number of nations have accumulated sophisticated advanced weapons systems, compounded by the integration of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and robotics.[39] Hardware, including equipment, materials, and components for weapons systems, can be manufactured locally or imported. However, controlling access to, and the procurement of, emerging technologies related to ACWs presents a more difficult challenge.[40] The integration of machine learning, robotics, quantum technologies, semiconductors, and related technologies into existing weapons systems will make them more sophisticated and potentially more difficult to counter. Technology proliferation is increasingly about knowledge and not just the physical weapon.[41] Traditional export control systems are primarily designed to control tangible items such as equipment, materials, and components. Tacit knowledge and intangible technology required to develop advanced weapons are considerably harder to monitor within the international community. This is largely due to their immaterial nature allowing them to cross borders more easily than the actual weapons systems.[42]

Hypersonic weapons illustrate this phenomenon, where a Member State may already possess ballistic-missile technology, but lack the advanced research and technological capabilities required to develop more sophisticated systems such as hypersonic glide vehicles.[43] Acquiring the knowledge and expertise of someone with underlying technology can therefore accelerate weapons development without necessarily involving the direct purchase of a finished weapon. Emerging technologies are creating a dual-use proliferation problem: international security is no longer solely about controlling the transfer of completed weapons or physical components, but also about controlling access to tacit knowledge, scientific research, financial investment, and technologies that can enhance advanced conventional weapons.[44]

Future Outlook

A central component to the United Nations' disarmament agenda is the elimination of nuclear weapons, maintenance of prohibitions against other weapons of mass destruction such as biological weapons, regulation of conventional weapons, and

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[39] Viski, A. (2022, February). *Advanced conventional weapons and emerging technologies: Recognizing and preempting proliferation threats*. Strategic Trade Research Institute.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Viski, A. (2022, February). *Advanced conventional weapons and emerging technologies: Recognizing and preempting proliferation threats*. Strategic Trade Research Institute.

responses to emerging weapons technologies.[45] International cooperation is required to maintain these, but it is also essential in addressing emerging technologies with significant dual-use applications. While AI, biotechnology, robotics, and other emerging technologies can provide substantial civilian benefits, they simultaneously create new military and proliferation risks. Future cooperation may therefore require greater engagement among Member States, international organizations, and scientific institutions, across academia and industry alike. When emerging technologies are developed in the civilian or commercial sectors rather than within traditional defense establishments such as the military, cooperation is particularly important to counter dual use institutions or technologies.[46]

Existing international agreements are increasingly recognized as lacking sufficiency as technological advancements are outpacing such agreements and treaties. Future agreements could address specific technologies, establish broader principles governing their military applications, or supplement existing treaties through additional protocols, confidence building measures, political declarations, or codes of conduct. Lethal autonomous weapons systems are one area in which Member States are already developing additional international rules.[47] The UN adopted A/RES/80/57 in 2025 on lethal autonomous weapons systems, which reflects continued international consideration of the risks and challenges associated with autonomous weapons.[48] United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has called for the establishment of a legally binding instrument concerning LAWS, emphasizing the importance of maintaining human control over the use of force and AI.[49]

Future international frameworks may need to consider the convergence of multiple technologies and systems rather than addressing each technology independently. AI may cause concerns in convergence with biotechnology, cyber capabilities, nuclear command-and-control systems, autonomous weapons, and advanced conventional weapons. Future approaches may be implemented by combining legally binding treaties, voluntary norms, confidence-building measures, transparency mechanisms, technical standards, and national legislation. Balancing Member States' security and military interests with scientific and technological development along with their protected right for peaceful scientific uses will be essential in the ongoing efforts for the maintenance of international peace and security

[45] United Nations. (2025). *Disarmament.* In *Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization 2025*.
[46] United Nations. (2025). *Disarmament.* In *Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization 2025*.
[47] Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, Group of Governmental Experts on Emerging Technologies in the Area of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. (2025, April 7). *Chair's summary—First 2025 session of the GGE on LAWS*(CCW/GGE.1/2025/WP.1). United Nations.
[48] United Nations General Assembly. (2025, December 1). *Lethal autonomous weapons systems (A/RES/80/57)*. United Nations.
[49] United Nations. (2026, February 23). *Secretary-General's remarks to the Conference on Disarmament.*

Focus Questions

Key questions for consideration include:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of existing treaties?
- How can compliance with international treaties be improved?
- What kinds of emerging technologies are a threat to global stability more than they benefit society?
- How can Member States limit the risks associated with synthetic biology and artificial intelligence while preserving scientific discovery?
- Is international security best protected by negotiating entirely new treaties or by adapting and strengthening existing agreements?

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