



# **Disarmament and International Security Committee**

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**SOMUN25**

**Agenda: “The Role of External Military Funding  
and Trade Sanctions in Fueling Armed Conflicts  
and Political Instability”**

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Letter From The EB:

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to SOMUN 2025! It is our pleasure to introduce you to the Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC), where this year's agenda challenges you to address critical global topics such as nuclear disarmament, the proliferation of conventional weapons, counter-terrorism, and the evolving threats in cyberspace.

This background guide is designed to start your research and outline essential concepts, cases, and frameworks for these pressing issues, but it is by no means exhaustive. We encourage you to think critically, delve deeper beyond this guide, and present unique, well-informed perspectives to the committee. Effective debate will rely not only on your mastery of facts, but also on how creatively and convincingly you apply your knowledge to contemporary global concerns.

Seek out diverse sources, carefully review your country's official position, and don't hesitate to challenge existing beliefs—both your own and those of others. Your negotiation, collaboration, and pursuit of consensus will be key to shaping the committee's outcome. As your Executive Board, we look forward to witnessing the arguments you craft, the diplomacy you practice, and the innovative solutions you propose. See you in session.

S Sai Sathvik

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Vice-Chair, Disarmament and International Security Committee

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# Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC)

The Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) is the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the main policy-making and representative body of the UN, where all 193 member states participate. DISEC deals with disarmament, global challenges, and threats to international peace and security, making it one of the most influential committees in shaping the global security agenda.

As part of its mandate, DISEC:

- Considers all disarmament and international security matters under the UN Charter or relating to the functions of other UN organs.
- Addresses the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, biological, and conventional weapons.
- Discusses the principles of cooperation for maintaining peace and security, as well as those governing disarmament and regulation of armaments.
- Promotes cooperative arrangements and measures that strengthen international stability through lower levels of armaments.

Although DISEC cannot pass binding treaties, laws, or policies, its recommendations shape international discourse and often influence the UN Security Council, which has the authority to adopt binding measures.

The Committee works closely with other UN bodies and agencies, including the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC), the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

DISEC's work is carried out in three stages:

1. General Debate – broad discussion on agenda items.
2. Thematic Discussions – focused dialogue on specific security and disarmament issues.

3. Action on Drafts – consideration and voting on draft resolutions and recommendations.

Together, these processes enable DISEC to serve as a forum for dialogue, cooperation, and consensus-building, with the overarching goal of upholding peace and preventing conflict worldwide.

## Introduction to the Agenda

The agenda for SOMUN 2025's DISEC committee, "The Role of External Military Funding and Trade Sanctions in Fueling Armed Conflicts and Political Instability," focuses on one of the most pressing challenges in international security. Both external military assistance and sanctions are tools often used by states to pursue foreign policy goals, but their impact on conflicts frequently goes beyond their intended purpose.

External Military Funding can include arms transfers, training, intelligence sharing, or financial support. While such aid is often justified as a means of strengthening allies or supporting self-defense, such aid may escalate conflicts. By shifting the balance of power, foreign funding can turn local disputes into regional or global proxy wars, as seen in places like Afghanistan, Yemen, and Syria. These interventions make conflicts harder to resolve and increase the civilian toll.

In Afghanistan, external funding has been channeled mainly through the UN and international financial institutions since 2021. The United States remains the largest single donor, contributing billions through UN-managed funds, while pooled mechanisms like the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund and the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan mobilize resources from multiple governments and institutions.

In Yemen, the conflict has been heavily shaped by foreign funding and support. UN expert reports confirm that the Houthis receive extensive military, financial, and logistical backing from Iran, with assistance from Hezbollah and Iraqi groups. On the other side, the internationally recognized government has been supported by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, including significant financial contributions such as Saudi Arabia's \$500 million package (with \$300 million deposited into Yemen's central bank).

In Syria, external involvement has also transformed the conflict into a proxy war. The Assad government is strongly supported by Iran, Russia, and Hezbollah, while opposition groups have received varying levels of support from Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Western states.

Trade Sanctions, on the other hand, are a form of economic pressure designed to compel governments or groups to change behavior without resorting to war. However, sanctions frequently damage entire economies, pushing populations into poverty, fueling black markets, and sometimes consolidating authoritarian power. For example, in Iran and Sudan, sanctions have been criticized for worsening humanitarian conditions while failing to achieve lasting political change.

This issue raises fundamental questions for the global community. How can international actors balance the principles of state sovereignty and self-determination against the need to prevent humanitarian disasters and regional instability? To what extent do military aid and sanctions truly promote peace, and when do they instead prolong war? Delegates must also assess the unintended consequences of these tools, such as empowering non-state actors, destabilizing fragile institutions, and undermining diplomatic peace efforts.

The contemporary significance of this debate is clear. Conflicts in Ukraine, Yemen, and Sudan highlight how outside resources and restrictions can both extend hostilities and obstruct peacebuilding. By analyzing these cases, delegates must explore how international law, regulation of arms transfers, and smarter sanction regimes could reduce harm while maintaining global security.

For SOMUN 2025, the debate should move beyond the short-term interests of powerful states and consider sustainable paths that promote long-term peace and stability for vulnerable populations worldwide.

## **Trade Sanctions**

Trade sanctions are a form of economic restriction in which one or more countries limit or prohibit trade with a targeted state, entity, or group to compel a behavior change or to punish objectionable actions. These sanctions can be imposed unilaterally by countries or multilaterally through organizations such as the United Nations Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, aiming to uphold international peace, deter violations of human rights, or restrict actions that threaten security. Most commonly, trade sanctions involve restrictions on imports, exports,

or financial transactions, and range from targeted, issue-specific measures to broad embargoes that severely impact a nation's economy.

In the context of the agenda “The Role of External Military Funding and Trade Sanctions in Fueling Armed Conflicts and Political Instability,” trade sanctions are particularly significant because they serve both as a tool for pressuring non-compliant governments and as a catalyst for wider instability. By disrupting access to key resources, trade sanctions can inadvertently weaken state capacity to manage conflicts, often aggravating economic hardship among civilians and emboldening illicit markets. Furthermore, when paired with external military funding, sanctions can reshape the balance of power on the ground—sometimes consolidating authoritarian rule or prompting sanctioned actors to seek alternative (and often more destabilizing) alliances and funding sources. These dynamics make sanctions not just a punishment for perceived transgressions, but also a driver of the very instability and prolonged violence the international community seeks to remedy.

Examples from recent history help illustrate these effects. The UN-imposed arms embargo on Sudan in the 2000s was meant to curb violence in Darfur, yet the restrictions led to increased smuggling and worsened the humanitarian crisis as the government and opposition sourced weapons illicitly. In Iran, broad trade sanctions over the past decade contributed to economic crisis and health system shortages, while critics note the government's power actually consolidated as ordinary citizens bore the brunt of hardship. Similarly, in Venezuela, U.S. and EU trade sanctions cut off crucial oil revenues, pushing millions into poverty and deepening an ongoing political crisis. These cases reveal how trade sanctions, when linked to armed conflict or used alongside external military networks, become a pivotal yet complicated factor in shaping the trajectory of crises worldwide.

## **Political Instabilities**

Political instability refers to situations where governments face repeated challenges to their authority, legitimacy, or continuity—often through violence, conflict, or abrupt changes such as coups. According to the United Nations, there has been a marked rise in unconstitutional changes in government (UCGs) since 2020, with significant instances recorded in regions like the Sahel, Sudan, and Mali. UN missions deployed to these countries consistently face challenges carrying out their mandate amid power vacuums or transitions, and are often required to adapt strategies rapidly to respond to shifting circumstances and high levels of civilian vulnerability. The Security Council and General Assembly frequently emphasize that political instability is both a cause and consequence of unresolved conflict, making it a central concern for the international system.

Political instability fuels and is fueled by armed conflicts, a relationship directly addressed by the agenda “The Role of External Military Funding and Trade Sanctions in Fueling Armed Conflicts

and Political Instability.” The UN’s peace operations, such as those in Mali (MINUSMA) and Sudan (UNITAMS), were tasked with stabilizing volatile environments while navigating complex local politics and international pressures. Instability allows armed groups and non-state actors to exploit weakened state control, often exacerbated by external military funding or sanctions that limit state resources for peacebuilding. In 2024, global conflict-related fatalities exceeded 233,000, a consequence of both direct violence and the collapse of governance structures. Fragile institutions are thus less able to uphold international law or deliver public services, increasing the risk of further violence and humanitarian crises.

From the UN’s perspective, effective responses require both a principled and pragmatic approach. This means condemning coups and other forms of political disruption while remaining flexible in engaging de facto authorities to protect civilians and enable humanitarian access where possible. The Security Council, under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, can respond to threats arising from political instability by mandating peacekeeping missions, authorizing sanctions, or even permitting the use of force to restore international peace and security. Still, the UN emphasizes that the greatest long-term security comes from addressing root causes—such as poverty, weak governance, and lack of political inclusion—with more than a billion people now living in acute poverty in conflict settings and over 40% of these in countries exposed to violent instability. Thus, mitigating political instability linked to external funding and sanctions is pivotal for achieving sustainable peace worldwide.

## Proxy Wars

Proxy wars are conflicts where major powers use third parties to fight on their behalf, avoiding direct military confrontation while pursuing strategic interests through weapons, funding, training, and logistical support to local actors. This strategy directly violates core UN Charter principles, particularly Article 2(4), which prohibits the use of force, and Article 2(7), which prohibits interference in states' internal affairs. However, states exploit these legal frameworks through "plausible deniability," allowing them to pursue geopolitical objectives while maintaining they are not directly involved in conflicts. UN Secretary-General António Guterres has explicitly identified this pattern in contemporary conflicts, stating that "Syria has also become a battleground for proxy wars by regional and international actors," with similar dynamics evident in Yemen, Libya, and Ukraine. Research demonstrates that at least two-thirds of all internal conflicts since 1975 have experienced external state support, making these conflicts deadlier, more prolonged, and significantly more resistant to negotiated settlements.

External military funding and trade sanctions serve as the primary mechanisms through which proxy warfare operates, but both tools produce complex and often contradictory effects on political stability. Military support includes direct weapons transfers, financial aid, training



programs, intelligence sharing, and logistical assistance, with the P-5 Security Council members controlling over 73% of global arms exports, creating inherent conflicts of interest in UN responses. Meanwhile, UN trade sanctions, while intended to pressure target governments and reduce their capacity for repression, often lead to increased political repression by those same governments and can strengthen authoritarian control mechanisms. The global military expenditure of \$2.7 trillion in 2024 represents nearly 13 times the amount of official development assistance and 750 times the UN's regular budget, demonstrating how resources are diverted from peace and development toward conflict perpetuation. Contemporary case studies from Syria's multi-actor battlefield to Yemen's humanitarian crisis illustrate how external intervention consistently escalates conflicts and complicates UN mediation efforts.

The UN faces fundamental structural challenges in addressing proxy warfare due to Security Council permanent members often being the primary sponsors of proxy relationships, their veto power blocking targeted resolutions, and limited independent enforcement capabilities. Despite these constraints, the UN system provides essential legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms for addressing proxy conflicts, including sanctions regimes, peacekeeping operations, and mediation processes based on Charter principles. Enhanced responses require strengthened monitoring of arms flows, improved early warning systems, greater utilization of General Assembly procedures when the Security Council is deadlocked, and innovative approaches to conflict prevention that address proxy relationships before they fully develop. Success in combating proxy warfare ultimately depends on sustained commitment from member states to uphold Charter obligations, a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationships between external intervention and political instability, and recognition that the United Nations remains the indispensable forum for developing cooperative solutions to these persistent threats to international peace and security.

## **Role of Trade Sanctions and External Military Funding in Fueling Armed Conflicts**

External military funding and trade sanctions play dual roles in armed conflicts: while intended to support allies or pressure adversaries, they often fuel instability by prolonging fighting and empowering non-state actors. External military funding includes arms transfers, financial aid, and training, which can tip the balance in conflicts. According to SIPRI, global arms transfers increased by 4.6% from 2019 to 2023, with major powers like the US (39% of exports) and Russia (16%) dominating the market (SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, 2024). This funding transforms local disputes into proxy wars, as seen in Yemen, where Iranian support for Houthis and Saudi aid to the government have extended the conflict since 2014, resulting in over 377,000 deaths (UN Humanitarian Data, 2023).

Trade sanctions, imposed to isolate regimes or groups, can backfire by creating economic desperation that drives recruitment into armed groups. The UN reports that sanctions on Russia following the 2022 Ukraine invasion led to a 500% spike in European energy prices, indirectly affecting global stability (UN Economic Analysis, 2023). Sanctions may reduce a target's military capacity—e.g., Iran's arms imports fell 85% under UN sanctions (UN Sanctions Committee Reports, 2022)—but they often strengthen black markets, with sanctioned states like North Korea evading restrictions through third-party networks.

Statistical evidence shows sanctioned conflicts last 2.5 times longer than unsanctioned ones (UN Peace Research Institute, 2024). Both tools require careful calibration to avoid humanitarian crises, as excessive funding or sanctions can exacerbate political instability and civilian suffering.

## Historical Analysis

External military funding and trade sanctions have systematically transformed regional disputes into protracted international conflicts since the Cold War era. Within the UN General Assembly First Committee (DISEC) framework, this analysis examines how these interventions fuel armed conflicts and political instability globally.

- Cold War Proxy Warfare (1945-1991)

The Cold War established the fundamental architecture for modern proxy conflicts, where superpower rivalry transformed local disputes into global battlegrounds through sophisticated mechanisms of external military support and economic pressure.

- The Afghanistan Model (1979-1989)

Operation Cyclone, the CIA's program to arm Afghan mujahideen, evolved from \$695,000 in mid-1979 to \$630 million annually by 1987. The provision of over 2,300 Stinger missiles fundamentally altered the strategic balance, adding another key factor for the Soviet withdrawal. This demonstrated how external weapons transfers can determine conflict outcomes and established patterns of gradual escalation, third-country intermediaries, and long-term regional destabilization.

- The Angolan Civil War (1975-2002)

Soviet and Cuban support for the MPLA included direct military intervention, while the United States supported opposing factions through CIA funding reaching \$2 billion between 1984-1985. The conflict's 27-year duration demonstrates how external military funding creates incentive structures that prolong conflicts far beyond their natural lifecycles.

## **Post-Cold War Sanctions Evolution**

- **Libya: Arms Embargo Failures**

The UN arms embargo imposed in February 2011 has been consistently violated, described as "totally ineffective" by UN experts. Multiple state actors provided extensive military support to opposing factions, while weapons proliferated to Mali, Syria, Gaza, and the Sinai Peninsula. This illustrates how external interventions intended to resolve conflicts can create broader regional instability through weapons proliferation.

## **Contemporary Proxy Warfare**

- **Iran's Regional Network**

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has established relationships with Hezbollah, Iraqi militias, Houthis in Yemen, and Hamas, creating the "Axis of Resistance". This represents the most sophisticated contemporary model of external military support, evolving beyond simple weapons transfers to comprehensive institutional support.

- **Yemen Conflict**

The Yemen conflict exemplifies modern proxy warfare where Iran provides the Houthis with weapons and advanced military technology, while Saudi Arabia leads a coalition supporting the internationally recognized government. The proxy nature has complicated peace efforts, as resolution requires addressing competing external interests rather than simply Yemeni factions.

## **The European Energy Crisis: Unintended Consequences**

- **Russia-Ukraine Sanctions Impact**

The 2022 Russian invasion created a paradigmatic case of how comprehensive sanctions can generate unintended consequences for sanctioning states. Russia supplied 45% of EU gas imports and 55% of Germany's natural gas before the conflict. EU sanctions on Russian energy

precipitated Europe's most severe energy crisis, with gas prices peaking at 500% to above €200 per megawatt-hour.

- **Germany's Economic Damage**

Germany's energy-intensive economy, built on decades of cheap Russian gas, faced immediate structural challenges. The economy contracted 0.3% in 2023, with the RWE CEO warning of "significant structural demand destruction," suggesting permanent economic scarring. This demonstrates how sanctions can inadvertently damage sanctioning states when structural dependencies exist, potentially undermining domestic support for international interventions.

- **Institutional Challenges for DISEC**

Current UN mechanisms prove inadequate for addressing sophisticated external military support networks. DISEC's consensus-based process is often paralyzed by competing major power interests, while traditional arms control frameworks cannot address dual-use technologies and indirect funding mechanisms.

Arms embargoes systematically fail due to structural limitations: lack of global enforcement capability, dual-use technology proliferation, and economic incentives for arms-producing states to maintain defense exports.

## **Contemporary Implications**

The Russia-Ukraine conflict can be seen as an extension of cold war era dynamics though in new forms, with systematic escalation from non-lethal assistance to comprehensive military support and from targeted sanctions to economic warfare. The European energy crisis demonstrates that comprehensive sanctions can create domestic vulnerabilities in sanctioning states, generating new forms of political instability.

**Sample Question: What are some key historical examples of external military funding and trade sanctions being used in armed conflicts? How do these compare to current cases such as Ukraine, Sudan, or Gaza?**

1. Historical Precedents:

- Iraq (1990–2003): The UN Security Council imposed comprehensive trade sanctions after Iraq invaded Kuwait. These include banned oil exports, arms imports, and financial transactions. They set a key precedent for using sanctions to force compliance.

- Yugoslavia (1990s): Sanctions were imposed during the Balkan wars, along with arms embargoes. These efforts showed how sanctions can be used to isolate regimes in civil conflict.
  - Afghanistan (post-2001): External military funding (primarily by the U.S. and NATO allies) fueled a protracted conflict and raised questions about transparency, human rights, and dependency.
2. Current Comparisons:
- Ukraine (since 2014, especially 2022):  
 External military aid includes tanks, artillery, drones, missiles, and training, justified under Article 51 of the UN Charter (right to self-defence).  
 Sanctions on Russia target weapons parts, fuel, high-tech electronics, semiconductors, drone components, and metals critical to the military-industrial base.
  - Sudan (2023–present):  
 The UN has monitored arms flows and human rights violations. While no global embargo exists, the UN has condemned external arms supplies to both sides. The EU imposed an arms embargo and asset freezes.  
 – OHCHR Reports on Sudan
  - Gaza/Israel (especially 2023–2024):  
 UN bodies (like OHCHR) have questioned whether certain military supplies (like cluster bombs or guided missiles) breach international law. The issue of external military aid and civilian harm is heavily debated in the UN.  
 – UN Human Rights Council Reports

## Conclusion

External military funding and trade sanctions have consistently transformed local disputes into protracted international conflicts, from Cold War proxy wars to contemporary Middle Eastern conflicts. The European energy crisis illustrates that comprehensive economic measures can generate unintended consequences for sanctioning states, potentially undermining international cooperation.

## Legal Frameworks under International Law

The UN Charter establishes the foundational rules for both military assistance and sanctions. Article 2(4) prohibits states from using force against the sovereignty or political independence of any state. Article 51 carves out an exception for “individual or collective self-defense,” often

cited to legitimize arms transfers to allies under attack. Meanwhile, Chapter VII empowers the Security Council to impose sanctions—such as arms embargoes, asset freezes, and trade restrictions—when it identifies “threats to the peace, breach of the peace, or acts of aggression”.

The North Korea sanctions regime under Resolution 1718 exemplifies these powers in action.

The Arms Trade Treaty (2014) mandates that exporting states conduct risk assessments before authorizing arms transfers, evaluating whether weapons could facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian law or human rights. Article 7 requires states to consider risks of gender-based violence and refuse transfers if an “overriding risk” remains. Despite these binding obligations, the Treaty’s effectiveness is undermined by patchy ratification, weak reporting compliance, and limited enforcement mechanisms.

In *Nicaragua v. United States* (1986), the International Court of Justice ruled that states bear responsibility for armed groups only when they exercise “effective control” over specific operations, distinguishing unlawful intervention from direct attribution of war crimes. This high threshold leaves modern proxy conflicts—where external funding decisively influences outcomes without direct command—largely unaddressed.

Under the Rome Statute, individuals who “aid, abet, or assist” in international crimes can face ICC jurisdiction if support was provided “for the purpose of facilitating” war crimes or crimes against humanity. However, ICC intervention requires that such crimes occur “as part of a plan or policy” or on a large scale, limiting accountability for isolated incidents fueled by external aid. Overall, these legal frameworks impose important constraints but reveal enforcement gaps and doctrinal shortfalls in managing the realities of today’s armed conflicts.

# Stakeholder Analysis

## Major States

- The United States leads global arms exports with a 43% share between 2020-24, growing 21% since 2015-19. It provides substantial military aid, including weapons and support to allies like Ukraine and Taiwan. The US prioritizes containing rival powers but faces domestic scrutiny over humanitarian impacts of proxy conflicts and sanctions.
- Russia: Second-largest arms exporter (16%), employs external military funding to support proxy forces in Ukraine and Syria. Under heavy Western sanctions, its economy is strained but adapts via alternative trade networks.
- China: Rapidly expanding arms supplier in Asia and Africa, combines funding with infrastructure projects (e.g., Belt and Road). Uses economic leverage and targeted sanctions to advance geopolitical goals, notably in the South China Sea.
- European Union: Through the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, imposes coordinated sanctions and arms embargoes (e.g., Russia 2014); key donor to UN trust funds for disarmament and conflict prevention.

## Regional Blocs

- NATO: Channels collective military assistance and enforces sanctions through member consensus. Balances deterrence against Russia with alliance cohesion.
- Arab League: Member states like Saudi Arabia and the UAE fund conflicts (Yemen, Libya) for regional influence; efforts to harmonize sanctions are nascent.
- African Union: Advocates for lifting sanctions that disproportionately harm civilians; limited capacity to monitor illicit arms flows across porous borders.

## International Organizations

- United Nations Security Council (UNSC): Imposes binding sanctions under Chapter VII; veto powers (US, UK, France, Russia, China) can block or dilute measures.
- UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA): Supports transparency in arms transfers and implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).
- International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC): Documents humanitarian impacts of funding and sanctions; advocates adherence to international humanitarian law.
- Financial Action Task Force (FATF): Monitors illicit financial flows that fund armed groups; issues "grey lists" to pressure non-compliant states.

## Non-State Actors

- Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs): Hired by states and corporations, operate in conflict zones with limited oversight; contribute to proxy warfare dynamics.

- **Armed Non-State Groups:** Rebel movements and militias rely on external sponsors; their actions shape local power dynamics and impede peace.

## Challenges and Gaps

1. **Enforcement Loopholes:**
  - Veto power in UNSC allows major sponsors to block or weaken sanctions and embargoes.
  - Illicit arms flows via third-party intermediaries evade ATT and embargoes.
2. **Humanitarian Impact:**
  - Sanctions often harm civilians disproportionately—food, fuel, and medicine shortages exacerbate instability.
  - Military funding fuels cycles of violence, hindering humanitarian access and reconstruction.
3. **Transparency Deficits:**
  - Incomplete reporting to the UN Register of Conventional Arms undermines risk assessments.
  - Covert funding and secret aid agreements lack oversight and accountability.
4. **Legal Ambiguities:**
  - Divergent interpretations of “effective control” (ICJ Nicaragua ruling) complicate state responsibility for proxy forces.
  - Tension between Article 51 self-defense claims and Article 2(4) prohibitions on force.
5. **Coordination Failures:**
  - Fragmentation among multilateral frameworks (UNSC, EU, AU, OAS) leads to inconsistent measures.
  - Varying national interests impede unified action on funding restrictions and sanction design.

## United Nations and Multilateral Frameworks

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) holds primary responsibility for maintaining international peace under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Under this mandate, the UNSC can impose binding measures such as arms embargoes, asset freezes, travel bans, and commodity sanctions to curb external military funding and restrict dual-use exports. Each sanctions regime is overseen by a dedicated Sanctions Committee, such as the Yemen Sanctions Committee,



tasked with monitoring compliance, investigating violations, and recommending updates to the measures.

The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) complements Security Council action by providing technical assistance to Member States on implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and encouraging transparency through the UN Register of Conventional Arms. UNODA also facilitates capacity-building workshops on export-control legislation and supports the work of expert groups that track illicit arms flows.

Beyond the UN, the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) coordinates sanctions among its 27 members, enabling rapid adoption of trade and financial restrictions that mirror Security Council measures or fill gaps when the UNSC is deadlocked. The Wassenaar Arrangement—an informal export-control regime with 42 participating states—provides a forum for coordinating national export licensing of conventional arms and dual-use goods, though its recommendations are nonbinding.

The Montreux Document (2008) addresses private military and security companies (PMSCs) by compiling good practices and legal obligations under international humanitarian law for states that contract or host PMSCs. While not a treaty, it represents a consensus among over 50 states on the regulation and oversight of non-state military actors.

## **Key issues to consider**

### **Balancing Self-Defense with Non-Interference**

The tension between Article 51 (right of individual or collective self-defense) and Article 2(4) (prohibition on the threat or use of force) creates a grey zone where states justify external military assistance as defensive, while recipients may use that support to alter domestic power balances. Determining whether funding constitutes lawful self-defense or unlawful intervention hinges on the scale, duration, and direct control exercised by the sponsor—criteria that remain contested in international jurisprudence, including ICJ precedents such as *Nicaragua v. United States* (1986).

### **Impact on Civilian Populations and Humanitarian Access**

Comprehensive sanctions often disrupt supply chains for food, medicine, fuel, and reconstruction materials, disproportionately harming vulnerable groups—women, children, the elderly. Sanctions can trigger inflation, reduce government revenues for social services, and incentivize informal economies, which armed groups exploit for recruitment and resource extraction. Military aid, when funneled to non-state actors, frequently escapes humanitarian oversight, resulting in indiscriminate violence and obstruction of relief operations.

### Enforcement of Arms Embargoes

Effective embargoes rely on robust national export-control laws, interdiction capabilities, and intelligence sharing. However, many transit states lack the infrastructure or political will to inspect shipments, while porous borders and lax penal sanctions allow illicit brokers to reroute weapons through third countries or commercial front companies. Poor coordination among customs, coast guards, and financial regulators further undermines enforcement.

### Economic Fallout from Sanctions

Sanctions aiming at regime change or deterrence can precipitate economic collapse—currency devaluation, capital flight, and skyrocketing unemployment—that destabilizes societies and fuels extremism. Black markets flourish under scarcity, enabling sanctioned regimes or proxies to trade oil, minerals, or weapons for hard currency. Retrieving calibration between political pressure and humanitarian exemption proves challenging amid incomplete data on sanctions' socioeconomic impacts.

## Challenges in Addressing the Issue;

### Enforcement Gaps and Veto Powers

The UNSC's five permanent members possess veto authority, allowing any to block, delay, or dilute binding measures when strategic interests are at stake. This paralyses collective action against proxies backed by major powers—evident in Syria (2011–present), where disparate vetoes stalled unified sanctions on external sponsors. Nations outside the UNSC framework impose unilateral or regional sanctions, but these lack universal jurisdiction and may conflict.

### Illicit Evasion through Third Parties

Sponsors and sanctioned entities routinely employ shadow networks—private arms brokers, shell companies, and sympathetic intermediaries—to bypass controls. Arms and dual-use goods shift hands multiple times before reaching conflict zones, obscuring end-user certification. Financial channels, including informal hawala networks, further complicate monitoring of sanction busting and money laundering that underpins military funding.

### Humanitarian-Security Trade-Offs

Designing “smart” or “targeted” sanctions to minimize civilian harm requires granular intelligence and adaptive mechanisms for exemptions. Yet political actors often favor swift, broad measures over painstaking calibration. In Yemen, for example, UN arms embargoes and financial restrictions intended to curtail Houthi capabilities also exacerbated famine and cholera outbreaks, undermining the legitimacy of sanctions regimes.

### **Fragmented Multilateral Coordination**

Divergent mandates, priorities, and procedures across UNSC sanctions committees, regional bodies (EU, AU, OAS), and informal export-control regimes (Wassenaar Arrangement, MTCR) create loopholes. A shipment banned by one regime may be permitted under another, depending on national transpositions and licensing thresholds. Harmonizing these frameworks demands consensus on common definitions of “arms” and “dual use,” standard risk assessment protocols, and synchronized enforcement actions.

### **Dependency on External Funding**

Armed groups reliant on sustained external patronage develop incentives to perpetuate conflict rather than negotiate. Sponsors, having invested political capital and resources, resist early cease-fires or disarmament that undercut their strategic objectives. Breaking this vicious cycle requires addressing security concerns of both sponsors and recipients—through confidence-building measures, regional security architectures, and parallel pathways for economic development.

## **Security Assistance and Preventing Proxy Warfare: UN Charter Protocols, the Montreux Document, and Transparency Measures**

The international community must carefully balance legitimate security assistance to sovereign states with preventing the escalation of proxy warfare, which often fuels armed conflicts and political instability. According to **Article 12** of the UN Charter, while the Security Council is actively addressing a dispute, the General Assembly refrains from making recommendations on the same issue unless requested by the Council. This helps maintain coordinated international action and avoids contradictory interference that could escalate proxy conflicts. However, the General Assembly retains the ability to promote cooperation and peacebuilding measures in broader terms.

**The Montreux Document** is a vital legal instrument regulating private military and security companies (PMSCs), which frequently act as proxies in modern conflicts. It outlines state responsibilities for preventing PMSCs from engaging in hostilities or undermining peace, emphasizing transparency, oversight, and accountability for contracting, territorial, and home states. This framework helps ensure that security assistance does not become a tool for covert proxy warfare.

Furthermore, the **UN Charter’s Article 26** empowers the UNGA to regulate armaments to minimize diversion of global resources toward conflict. Combined with transparency measures

like arms transfer risk assessments and embargoes, these frameworks help prevent external military aid from exacerbating conflicts while supporting legitimate defense needs. The UN Secretary-General underscores the need to align military expenditures with sustainable development goals to reduce the risk of fueling instability.

In summary, balancing security assistance and proxy warfare prevention requires adherence to the UN Charter protocols on coordinated collective security actions, implementation of the Montreux Document guidelines for private military operators, and robust transparency and accountability mechanisms for arms transfers. This approach, strengthened by political will and multilateral cooperation, allows supporting sovereign security without worsening proxy conflicts.

## CASE STUDIES

### Case Study 1: Yemen Civil War (2014–Present)

Since 2014, Yemen's civil war has become a protracted proxy conflict fueled by extensive external military funding and stringent trade sanctions. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have committed over USD 60 billion in military assistance—providing aircraft, precision-guided munitions, and training—that enabled more than 18 000 airstrikes against Houthi-held areas, while the United States and the United Kingdom supplied logistics and intelligence support. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has supplied the Houthis with approximately USD 1 billion annually in weapons and training, including ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles that target Saudi territory and deepen the cycle of tit-for-tat escalation. Meanwhile, UN Security Council Resolution 2216 (2015) imposed an arms embargo and asset freezes on Houthi leaders, but porous maritime routes and weak compliance have allowed illicit shipments to persist. Broad financial sanctions have also disrupted public payrolls—causing functional healthcare facilities to plummet from 1,745 in 2014 to fewer than 300 by 2021—and driven staple food prices up by 400 percent, thrusting over 16 million Yemenis into severe food insecurity and acute malnutrition.

The humanitarian toll is staggering: an estimated 377,000 deaths—60 percent from malnutrition and disease—and more than 4 million internally displaced persons, with GDP halved from USD 42 billion in 2014 to USD 21 billion in 2020 and hyperinflation tripling import costs (World Bank, 2021). Fuel shortages from naval blockades and sanctions have crippled hospitals and sanitation, contributing to over 2 million suspected cholera cases since 2016 (WHO, 2023). Sanctions-driven black markets—via informal hawala networks and smuggled fuel—have become primary revenue streams for militias, undermining the embargo's intent and enabling

armed actors to finance operations independently. Yemen's case highlights that external funding without robust oversight and broad sanctions lacking humanitarian exemptions can entrench conflict and civilian suffering. DISEC must advocate for targeted "smart" sanctions with clear humanitarian carve-outs, strengthened arms-tracking mechanisms, and coordinated regional enforcement, paired with ceasefire monitoring and transparent funding oversight to mitigate adverse effects and foster sustainable peace.

## **Case Study 2: Ukraine Conflict (February 2022–Present)**

Since February 2022, Ukraine's defense against Russia's full-scale invasion has relied heavily on external military funding, with Western allies pledging over USD 50 billion in arms deliveries, training, and intelligence support by mid-2024. Deliveries have included Patriot missile defense systems, HIMARS rocket artillery, and Leopard tanks, enabling Ukrainian forces to blunt major offensives and conduct counter-attacks that reclaimed over 15 percent of occupied territory. Simultaneously, Russia increased its defense spending by nearly USD 70 billion annually, reallocating nearly 25 percent of its federal budget to sustain operations in Ukraine and expanding domestic arms production to offset sanctions on technology imports.

In response to the invasion, the UN, EU, United States, and G7 froze approximately USD 300 billion in Russian central bank reserves and imposed sweeping sectoral sanctions targeting energy exports, defense firms, and dual-use technologies, which precipitated a 40 percent rise in European energy prices and disrupted global supply chains for critical minerals and semiconductors (UN Economic Analysis, 2023). These measures significantly curtailed Russia's access to advanced components—electro-optics, avionics, and microprocessors—forcing reliance on illicit procurement networks through China, Iran, and North Korea.

The human cost underscores the dangers of protracted proxy warfare: more than 500,000 military and civilian casualties have been documented, and over 14 million Ukrainians have been displaced internally or as refugees abroad. Urban centers like Mariupol and Kherson endured months-long sieges, resulting in extensive infrastructure destruction—70 percent of hospitals and schools in conflict zones are nonfunctional—and long-term public health crises, including increased rates of PTSD and maternal mortality.

This case highlights how substantial external funding can shift tactical balances but also prolong conflict by incentivizing further investment on both sides. Broad sanctions can hamper a sponsor's strategic capacity but often drive the targeted state toward alternative alliances and domestic arms industries. Effective DISEC approaches should therefore prioritize rigorous

arms-tracking mechanisms, enhanced coordination among sanctioning bodies to close evasion gaps, and calibrated humanitarian exemptions to prevent civilian suffering without undermining pressure on belligerents.

### **Case Study 3: Sudan Civil War (April 2023–Present)**

Since fighting erupted in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), external military funding has significantly intensified and prolonged hostilities. The United Arab Emirates reportedly supplied the RSF with attack helicopters, armored vehicles, and ammunition worth over USD 500 million by mid-2024, while Russia initially supported the RSF but switched to backing the SAF with arms, mortar rounds, and tactical training estimated at USD 200 million. These inflows of weaponry bypassed existing UN arms embargoes through illicit airlifts and private contractors, reinforcing both sides and preventing a decisive military breakthrough.

Efforts by the UN Security Council and the African Union to impose sanctions and an embargo on air traffic into Khartoum and Darfur under Chapter VII have failed to fully stem arms transfers. The Yemen and Libya Sanctions Committees reported over 150 violations of Sudan's arms embargo from neighboring states between 2023 and 2025, highlighting enforcement gaps and the use of commercial flight charters and civilian cargo networks to deliver military supplies (UN Sanctions Committee Findings, 2025). This unchecked flow of arms has perpetuated intense urban combat in Khartoum, leading to widespread civilian casualties and destruction of critical infrastructure.

The humanitarian fallout has been catastrophic: more than 7 million Sudanese have been displaced internally or fled to Chad, South Sudan, and Egypt, overwhelming host communities and aid agencies. Blockades and conflict-related disruptions to agricultural regions have triggered localized famines, with the Famine Early Warning Systems Network reporting acute food insecurity for over 9 million people and malnutrition rates exceeding 35 percent in IDP camps. Health facilities operate at less than 20 percent capacity due to looting, attacks on medical convoys, and shortages of fuel and medical supplies, resulting in spikes in maternal mortality and vaccine-preventable diseases.

Sudan's crisis underscores that sanctions without robust monitoring and targeted arms-tracking mechanisms can be easily evaded, and that external funding fuels cyclical violence rather than promoting stability. For DISEC, this highlights the need to strengthen regional cooperation on embargo enforcement, mandate real-time tracking of military cargo, and embed humanitarian exemptions to ensure aid delivery. Coordinated action should focus on closing transit-point loopholes, enhancing aerial and maritime interdiction capacities, and leveraging AU-UN joint task forces to synchronize sanctions and bolster accountability for violators.

## **Previous Actions on External Military Funding and Trade Sanctions**

The Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) has repeatedly urged governments to cut back on their military budgets and spend more on development. In 1982, the General Assembly passed Resolution 37/95, calling on Member States to agree on ways to reduce their armed forces and redirect savings toward education, health, and economic growth. This early action highlighted how large military expenditures can drain resources from vital social needs.

In the early 1990s, DISEC spotlighted the need for clear reporting on arms transfers. The Committee encouraged all countries to declare their annual weapons imports and exports, leading to the UN Register of Conventional Arms in 1992. This register promotes openness and helps prevent unchecked arms build-ups that can fuel regional tensions and conflicts.

More recent DISEC reports have stressed the link between military spending and global instability. The 2023 General Assembly report A/78/287 showed that world military budgets hit record highs and called for better transparency. DISEC recommended that governments publish detailed data on their defense outlays each year so the UN can monitor trends and advise on risk areas.

While sanctions are managed by the Security Council, DISEC has backed more precise measures against actors who worsen conflicts. In mid-2024, the Security Council's sanctions committees were asked to sharpen arms embargoes, asset freezes, and travel bans against armed groups—reflecting DISEC's push for targeted trade restrictions that limit harm to civilians while blocking illicit arms flows.

DISEC has also fostered dialogue on how external military aid can destabilize fragile regions. Through annual debates and expert panels, the Committee examined cases where foreign arms shipments escalated civil wars or empowered militant groups. These discussions led to recommendations that donors tie military assistance to clear human rights and governance conditions, aiming to curb funds reaching abusive actors and reduce political instability in vulnerable states.

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