



SECTION 6. COMMITTEES AND TOPICS

6.3 GENERAL ASSEMBLY FIRST COMMITTEE COMMITTEE ON DISARMAMENT AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY (DISEC)

Introduction

The First Committee of the General Assembly, also known as the Committee on Disarmament and International Security (DISEC), was created in 1961. The key issues for the committee are disarmament and non-proliferation of conventional, biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons. The committee is also concerned with the creation of nuclear-free zones, military conversion, military budgets, disarmament and development, illicit arms and trafficking, tension reduction and conflict building, and prevention of the arms race in space.

Topics

The Use of Chemical Weapons in Syria

The Operations and Employment of Private Military Security Corporations (PMSCs)

The Use of Chemical Weapons in Syria

The use of chemical weapons began in World War I during the Battle of Ypres when, in 1915, the Germans used chlorine gas against French and colonial troops. Following the end of the war, the Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare was adopted by the League of Nations, banning the use of chemical weapons in war. After the League of Nations became defunct, there was no new convention or protocol until the 1970s. As a result of prolonged efforts by the international community to establish a new instrument that would supplement the 1925 Geneva Protocol, *The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction* (usually referred to as the Biological Weapons Convention or Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, BTWC) was established in 1975.

Beginning in the suburbs of Damascus and Aleppo, Syria in 2013 and continuing through 2018, the renewed use of chemical weapons, in violation of the BTWC, has become an international crisis. UN investigations have identified at least 85 chemical attacks between August 21, 2013 and February 25th, 2018 across Syria.

In July of 2012, Syria publicly acknowledged its ownership of chemical weapons, leading to a handful of international and independent assessments of the Syrian stockpile. NATO member states have also talked of military action to forcibly take the Assad administration's weapons cache, while the Arab League has voiced strong opposition to strikes against Syrian government. Despite a bilateral U.S./Russian agreement to disarm and destroy chemical weapons in 2013, chemical weapons attacks in the region have continued to occur.

Questions to Consider:

1. What is your country's relationship with Syria?
2. Are you a member of NATO or the Arab League?
3. What, if any, impact has the war in Syria had on your country? May it impact your country in the future?
4. How might the U.S./ Russia agreement influence your country, and other countries, involvement in this issue?

Sources for Further Research:

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13489.doc.htm>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/02/turkey-denies-chemical-weapons-syria-afrin-180218082237109.html>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23876085>

<https://www.nti.org/learn/treaties-and-regimes/convention-prohibition-development-production-and-stockpiling-bacteriological-biological-and-toxin-weapons-btwc/>

<http://www.opbw.org/convention/conv.htm>

The Operations and Employment of Private Military Security Corporations (PMSCs)

Despite the 2001 United Nations Mercenary Convention, which prohibits the recruitment, use, financing, and training of mercenaries, the prevalence of Private Military Security Corporations (PMSCs) has continued to rise. The tracking and identification of PMSCs is notoriously difficult because of their legal ambiguity, but their services are heavily sought after by both private and public entities. The first PMSCs can be traced to post WWII Britain and, since then, their ability to deliver results at a relatively cheap price has contributed to their overwhelming popularity with developing nations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

More recently, nations have begun to use PMSCs as expendable fighters, sending them on more dangerous operations; commonly as military forces which a nation can legally disavow. This new breed of transnational corporations provide a service which falls beneath the purview of DISEC; however, DISEC has yet to author any resolution addressing their existence, all the while, these modern-day mercenaries are able to operate at the unbound discretion of their employers.

Questions to Consider:

1. Has your country ratified The United Nations Mercenary Convention?
2. What is your country's relationship to countries that have or have not ratified the existing convention?
3. Does your country use PMSCs? Are PMSCs used in your country?

Sources for Further Research:

www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/08/russian-mercenaries-wagner-africa/568435/

www.businessinsider.com/r-russian-military-veterans-seek-icc-investigation-of-mercenary-deployments-2018-11

www.occrp.org/en/daily/7837-private-security-companies-go-unchecked-in-latin-america

www.vice.com/en_us/article/exq9z/nigeria-pmcs-boko-harem