

DRS MUN

**United Nations General Assembly : First Committee
Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC)**

Background Guide

Agenda:

Addressing the Rise of Fourth-Generation Warfare and the Role of Defense Industries in Modern Day Conflicts

Important Points to Remember

A few aspects that delegates should keep in mind while preparing:

1. **Procedure:** The purpose of putting in procedural rules in any committee is to ensure a more organized and efficient debate. The committee will follow the UNA-USA Rules of Procedure. Although the Executive Board shall be fairly strict with the Rules of Procedure, the discussion of the agenda will be the main priority. So, delegates are advised not to restrict their statements due to hesitation regarding procedure.
2. **Foreign Policy:** Following the foreign policy of one's country is the most important aspect of a Model UN Conference. This is what essentially differentiates a Model UN from other debating formats. To violate one's foreign policy without adequate reason is one of the worst mistakes a delegate can make.
3. **Role of the Executive Board:** The Executive Board is appointed to facilitate debate. The committee shall decide the direction and flow of debate. The delegates are the ones who constitute the committee and hence must be uninhibited while presenting their opinions/stance on any issue. However, the Executive Board may put forward questions and/or ask for clarifications at all points of time to further debate and test participants.
4. **Nature of Source/Evidence:** This Background Guide is meant solely for research purposes and must not be cited as evidence to substantiate statements made during the conference. Evidence or proof for substantiating statements made during formal debate is acceptable from the following sources:
 - a. **United Nations:** Documents and findings by the United Nations or any related UN body is held as a credible proof to support a claim or argument. Multilateral Organizations: Documents from international organizations like OIC, NATO, SAARC, BRICS, EU, ASEAN, the International Court of Justice, etc. may also be presented as credible sources of information.

- b. **Government Reports:** These reports can be used in a similar way as the State Operated News Agencies reports and can, in all circumstances, be denied by another country.

c. **News Sources:**

1. Reuters: Any Reuters article that clearly makes mention of the fact or is in contradiction of the fact being stated by a delegate in council.
2. State operated News Agencies: These reports can be used in the support of or against the State that owns the News Agency. These reports, if credible or substantial enough, can be used in support of or against any country as such but in that situation, may be denied by any other country in the council. Some examples are – RIA Novosti (Russian Federation), Xinhua News Agency (People's Republic of China), etc.

****Please Note: Reports from NGOs working with UNESCO, UNICEF and other UN bodies will be accepted. Under no circumstances will sources like Wikipedia, or newspapers like the Guardian, Times of India, etc. be accepted. However, notwithstanding the criteria for acceptance of sources and evidence, delegates are still free to quote/cite from any source as they deem fit as a part of their statements.*

Guidelines

- Read the entirety of the background guide in the order it was written. Make sure to highlight the names of specific treaties, documents, resolutions, conventions, international bodies, events and any other specific incidents so that you can get back to them later and do a lot more thorough research.

- Understand some of the basic details regarding the country that you've been allotted whether this be the capital, current affairs regarding geopolitical situation, political hierarchy etc. While not strictly necessary, you never know when this can turn out to be handy. Geography Now's A - Z Country List has been a particularly helpful resource for this.

- Use a search engine of your choice to create as many tabs as possible for the highlighted terms from your background guide. Wikipedia or a YouTube video act as a great way to get a brief summary of the incidents at hand but such sources (especially Wikipedia articles) cannot be used in committee as sources.

- Delve into deeper research regarding the particular position of your allocation with the agenda at hand. Try searching for the voting stances of your allocation in related conventions and understanding the reasons for voting as so. UN Press Releases are also a helpful source for this matter.

- Find the website for the foreign ministry of the country you have been assigned alongside the "Permanent Mission of COUNTRY to the United Nations" website and search for a key term relating to the agenda, this should often give you statements from recent press conferences or UN committee sessions that can act as valuable sources of information in forming a position.

- Keep a handy copy of the Charter of the United Nations, whether as a .pdf file extension or a physical copy works. This contains the founding principles of the United Nations and contains articles that lay out the mandate of the six bodies that the

United Nations is primarily divided into. Spend some additional time researching the specific mandate and functions of the committee that you have been assigned.

- The Executive Board may ask for the source of a statement that a delegate makes in committee either during a Point of Order circumstance or if said statement stands to be of interest to the Executive Board. Therefore, it is recommended that delegates keep track of their sources when making / disputing a claim and also ensure their validity. Please do remember that while you as a delegate are allowed to cite any source you wish during committee.

Hierarchy of evidence

Evidence can be presented from a wide variety of sources but not all sources are treated as equal. Here's the hierarchy in which evidence is categorised:

Tier 1: Includes any publication, statement, resolution, or document released by any of the Nations' official organs or committees; any publication, statement, or document released by a UN member state in its own capacity. The evidence falling in this tier is considered most reliable during the simulation.

Tier 2: Includes: any news article published by any official media source that is owned and controlled by a UN member state. E.g.: Xinhua News (China), Prasar Bharti (India), BBC (United Kingdom) etcetera. The evidence falling in this tier is considered sufficiently reliable in case no other evidence from any Tier 1 source is available on that particular fact, event, or situation.

Tier 3: Includes: any publication from news sources of international repute such as Reuters, The New York Times, Agence-France Presse, etcetera. The evidence falling under this tier is considered the least reliable for the purposes of this simulation. Yet, if no better source is available in a certain scenario, it may be considered.

Foreign Policy and Foreign Relations

Foreign policy, in simple terms, is what your country aims to achieve in regards to the issue at hand or in general with its relations with other countries.

1. What role must foreign policy play in your research?

Understanding the foreign policy of your country must be a checkbox that you tick off at the very beginning of your research.

Your foreign policy should dictate everything from the arguments you make, the reasoning you give for making those arguments, and the actions you take in the Council.

2. Where do I look to find foreign policy?

Most of the time, foreign policy is not explicitly stated. It must be inferred from the actions and statements issued by the country. Reading the meeting records from previous meetings of UNSC (or any other UN body where your country might have spoken on the issue) is a great place to start. If such records are unavailable, look for statements from your country's Foreign Ministry (or equivalent like Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry for Foreign Affairs etcetera) and top leadership (PM, Pres., Secretary of State, Defence Minister).

Foreign Relations on the other hand refers to the diplomatic ties that one country has with another and considers elements such as the mutual presence of embassies, consulates, ambassadors & diplomatic dialogue. More often than not, foreign policy is what will be of your primary concern during your MUN but it is important to also consider any extremities in your allotted country's foreign relations.

Introduction to the Committee

The United Nations General Assembly is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and the only body that commands the presence of all 193 sovereign states. Other entities such as the African Union, the Vatican and Palestine for example maintain an observer status allowing them to participate in the discussions and work of the General Assembly. The General Assembly

convenes once a year, typically around September with sessions lasting close to around three months. However, emergency sessions can also be convened in accordance with UNGA resolution 377A (V) by a simple majority vote by members of the UN or with seven votes from any of the members from the Security Council. The mandate of the General Assembly allows it to discuss any matters that are within the scope of the UN charter allowing it to exercise deliberative, supervisory, financial and elective functions of any regard throughout the charter.

However, it does not have the power to enforce an action upon any sovereign state but can solely recommend a course of action to the Security Council, members of the United Nation or both, except as provided in article 12 of the UN Charter. Apart from providing recommendations, the General Assembly is tasked with a multitude of different functions which include: the election of judges to the International Court of Justice, the selection of members for the Economic and Social Council, the selection of non-permanent members for the United Nations Security Council, the appointment process for the Secretary General and the budgetary process for the United Nations to name a few.

While most decisions are based on a simple majority system, a few such as appointing a new member to the General Assembly require a two-thirds majority instead. While during the beginning of the General Assembly's session it does hold a general debate where any member may participate and raise an issue of international concern, most work is done in its six main sub-committees:

- Disarmament and International Security (colloquially referred to as DISEC)
- Economic and Financial (colloquially referred to as ECOFIN)
- Social, Humanitarian and Cultural (colloquially referred to as SOCHUM)
- Special, Political and Decolonisation (colloquially referred to as SPECPOL)
- Administrative & Budgetary
- Legal

Their names are for the most part self-explanatory of the issues that they focus on and are open to all members of the United Nations, each of these committees convene after the General Debate has ended each year and take action via the form of resolutions that are then sent to the General Assembly for voting. Some are unanimous with the support of all members whereas others are highly controversial and amount to heavy amounts of deliberation before consensus is reached.

The Mandate of DISEC

The committee considers all disarmament and international security matters within the scope of the Charter or relating to the powers and functions of any other organ of the United Nations; the general principles of cooperation in the maintenance of international peace and security, as well as principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments; promotion of cooperative arrangements and measures aimed at strengthening stability through lower levels of armaments. The Committee works in close cooperation with the United Nations Disarmament Commission and the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament. It is the only Main Committee of the General Assembly entitled to verbatim records coverage.

Introduction to the Agenda

For most of the twentieth century, the popular imagination of war was shaped by two enormous state-versus-state conflicts fought with mass armies, industrial production lines and clearly drawn front lines. That image, while never fully accurate even in its own time, has become an increasingly poor description of how force is actually used in the twenty-first century. From the mountains of Afghanistan to the drone-saturated trenches of the Donbas, from the streets of Mali to the server rooms hosting disinformation campaigns, conflict today is fought by a wider and stranger cast of actors, with a wider and stranger set of tools, than the conventional battlefield ever anticipated.

Military theorists have given this shift a name: fourth-generation warfare, or 4GW. The term describes conflict in which the line between combatant and civilian, between war and politics and between the battlefield and everyday life becomes deliberately blurred, and in which non-state actors, ideological networks and information campaigns can rival or outmatch the conventional militaries of sovereign states. Whether or not one accepts every claim made by the theory's original proponents, and as this guide will show, many scholars do not, the pattern it tries to describe is real and growing: insurgencies that outlast the great powers sent to fight them, cyberattacks that cripple infrastructure without a single soldier crossing a border and drone swarms purchased off the shelf that let a small state or a non-state militia contest the skies against a much larger adversary.

Running alongside this shift in the character of war is a second, closely connected story: the growing size, reach and influence of the global defense industry. Defense firms are no longer simply the suppliers of tanks and rifles to national armies. They are designers of the software that fuses sensor data into targeting decisions, operators of private military and security contracts that substitute for national troops, exporters whose weapons circulate for decades across borders and conflicts far from their point of sale and lobbies whose commercial interests can shape the very defense policies that create demand for their products. Global military expenditure has now risen for eleven consecutive years, reaching an estimated 2887 billion United States dollars in 2025, and revenues of the world's hundred largest arms-producing companies climbed to a record 679 billion dollars in the same period.

This agenda therefore requires holding two questions in mind at once. First, how should the international community understand, anticipate and respond to the tactics, actors and technologies associated with fourth-generation warfare? Second, what responsibilities, if any, should be placed on the defense industries whose products, services and revenues are so deeply entangled with the conflicts this committee exists to prevent and resolve? Neither question has a settled answer, and the tension between the security interests of states, the commercial interests

of defense firms and the humanitarian interests of civilians caught in modern conflict will run through every debate this committee holds on the subject.

Historical Background: The Generations of Warfare

From Line and Column to Manoeuvre

To understand fourth-generation warfare, it helps to understand the framework from which the term emerged. In 1989, a group of American defense analysts, most prominently William S. Lind, together with Colonel Keith Nightengale, published an article in the *Marine Corps Gazette* proposing that the history of modern warfare could be divided into distinct generations, each defined by a qualitative shift in tactics, technology and military culture rather than a simple change in equipment.

First-generation warfare is associated with the era of the smoothbore musket and the bayonet, when armies fought in rigid lines and columns and battlefield order depended on massed, closely drilled formations. Second-generation warfare emerged with the rifled musket, the machine gun and indirect artillery fire; it is most closely associated with the linear, firepower-centric doctrines of the First World War, in which massed fire, rather than manoeuvre, was expected to win battles. Third-generation warfare, exemplified by the German *Blitzkrieg* of the Second World War, broke from this linear model in favour of speed, depth and decentralised initiative: rather than trying to hold a continuous line, third-generation forces sought to bypass and dislocate the enemy, trusting junior officers to exercise judgement in pursuit of a commander's intent rather than following rigid, pre-set orders.

Lind and his co-authors then asked a question that would define the rest of his career: what would a fourth generation of warfare look like? Their answer, developed over the following decade, was that the defining feature of the new generation would not be a new weapon but a new kind of actor and a new kind of legitimacy crisis. Where the first three generations were fought between the organised armies of sovereign states, the fourth generation would be characterised by conflicts in which the state's monopoly on organised violence is directly challenged by ideological, tribal, religious or criminal networks that do not fight for territory in the traditional sense but for the loyalty, or at least the compliance, of a population.

It is important to know that 4GW theory, though influential in policy circles, is not universally accepted among historians and strategists. Critics such as Dr Antulio J. Echevarria II have argued that the theory overstates the novelty of irregular warfare, pointing out that insurgency, terrorism and guerrilla tactics are as old as organised warfare itself and that many of the patterns 4GW theorists describe as new were also present in colonial counter-insurgency campaigns, partisan resistance movements and ancient conflicts against tribal confederations. Other critics note that the theory tends to blur together several genuinely distinct phenomena, from cyberattacks to religious insurgency to corporate mercenary activity, under a single umbrella term.

The Post-Cold War Acceleration

The end of the Cold War in 1991 removed the bipolar discipline that had, for four decades, kept many regional conflicts contained within proxy limits set by Washington and Moscow. In its place emerged a more fragmented security environment: weak and collapsing states, an explosion of small arms left over from Cold War stockpiles, newly assertive regional powers and, from the mid-1990s onward, the rapid spread of information technology. Each of these developments fed directly into the conditions that 4GW theorists describe. Civil wars in the Balkans, the Great Lakes region of Africa and the former Soviet space showed how quickly state authority could collapse into contested, multi-actor violence. The September 2001 attacks on the United States, carried out by a non-state terrorist network rather than a state army, were treated by many strategists, Lind among them, as the clearest demonstration yet that a small, ideologically driven network could inflict strategic-level damage on the most powerful conventional military in the world.

The wars that followed in Afghanistan and Iraq deepened this lesson. Large, technologically superior state militaries found themselves bogged down for two decades against insurgencies that used improvised explosive devices, suicide attacks, propaganda and the protection of civilian populations to offset their material disadvantage. Lind's own later writing argued that Western militaries kept losing these wars precisely because they continued to fight fourth-generation opponents with second-generation methods built around firepower and centralised control rather than the political and cultural adaptability the new environment demanded.

Understanding Fourth-Generation Warfare

Core Characteristics

1. Blurring of war and politics. Military action becomes one tool among several, alongside propaganda, economic pressure and diplomacy, deployed continuously rather than in a clearly bounded "wartime."
2. Blurring of combatant and civilian. Non-state fighters frequently operate from within civilian populations, use civilian infrastructure and rely on the protections and ambiguity that civilian status provides, making non-combatants both shields and, at times, deliberate targets.
3. Decentralised, networked organisation. Rather than a top-down military hierarchy, fourth-generation actors often organise as loose, dispersed networks connected by ideology, kinship or shared grievance rather than formal chains of command, which makes them difficult to defeat by removing a single leadership structure.
4. A crisis of state legitimacy. Lind traces the roots of 4GW to situations in which a population no longer accepts the state, whether its own or an occupying power, as the legitimate source of order, creating space for alternative authorities, armed groups or ideologies to compete for loyalty.
5. Use of all available forms of pressure. Political, economic, social, informational and military instruments are combined into a single campaign, sometimes described elsewhere as "hybrid warfare," so that a conflict cannot be reduced to its battlefield component alone.
6. Low-intensity, protracted engagement. Rather than seeking a single decisive battle, fourth-generation actors typically favour long, low-intensity campaigns that exhaust an opponent's political will and economic resources over years or decades.

Hybrid and Grey-Zone Warfare

Hybrid warfare generally refers to the deliberate combination of conventional military force, irregular tactics, cyber operations, economic coercion and disinformation within a single campaign, often in a way that allows the aggressor to maintain a degree of deniability. Grey-zone conflict describes activity that sits below the threshold that would clearly trigger a conventional military response, such as the use of unmarked personnel, proxy militias, economic sanctions, cyber intrusions or coercive maritime activity, allowing a state to advance its objectives while avoiding formal war.

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 is frequently cited as a case study in this respect: the initial seizure of Crimean territory was carried out largely by unmarked, well-equipped soldiers,

later acknowledged by Moscow to be Russian servicemen, alongside local separatist militias and an intense information campaign, before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 shifted the conflict toward a more conventional, though still technologically hybrid, war. Both phases of the conflict illustrate different aspects of the same underlying trend: modern conflict rarely announces itself as a clean, declared war between uniformed armies.

Non-State and Sub-State Actors

A defining feature of 4GW is the growing capability of actors other than sovereign states to wage sustained, sometimes strategically significant, campaigns of violence. These actors include insurgent and terrorist organisations such as the group calling itself the Islamic State, which at its territorial peak administered something resembling a proto-state across parts of Iraq and Syria while simultaneously running a globally networked propaganda and recruitment operation; armed militias and warlord networks, such as those operating across the Sahel and Libya; and organised criminal networks, particularly drug trafficking organisations in Latin America, whose private armies now rival the firepower of some national police forces and have themselves begun to use armed drones.

A further category of non-state actor central to this agenda is the **private military and security company**, which is discussed at length in the following section on defense industries. What unites all of these actors is that they are able, to varying degrees, to project organised violence across borders and over long periods without possessing the formal attributes of statehood, which is precisely the condition that classical, state-centric international humanitarian law and disarmament frameworks were not originally designed to regulate.

Technological and Informational Dimensions of Modern Conflict

The Drone Revolution

If any single technology has come to symbolise fourth-generation and hybrid warfare in the past decade, it is the unmanned aerial vehicle, commonly called the drone. Drones have moved from being a niche capability of a handful of advanced militaries to a cheap, widely available tool that has reshaped tactics for state armies, insurgent groups and criminal organisations alike.

The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is widely regarded as a turning point. Azerbaijan combined Turkish-made Bayraktar armed drones with Israeli-made **Harop loitering munitions**, which are munitions that can circle above a target area before

diving into it, to destroy Armenian air-defence systems and armoured formations, allowing Baku to establish air superiority against a much larger, Soviet-legacy defence network. Some military analysts have described this conflict as the first war in history won primarily through robotic systems, although others caution that Armenia's own poor operational planning also contributed heavily to the outcome.

The war in Ukraine since February 2022 has taken this trend further still. Both Russian and Ukrainian forces have deployed cheap, first-person-view attack drones, loitering munitions such as Russia's Lancet and Iran-supplied Shahed drones and large numbers of reconnaissance quadcopters to compress what military analysts call the "kill chain," the time between detecting a target and destroying it, down to a matter of minutes. Ukraine's domestic drone industry, largely decentralised and involving hundreds of small producers alongside home-based volunteer manufacturers, illustrates how a state under existential pressure can rapidly substitute cheap, mass-produced technology for the expensive precision munitions that a larger defense industry would normally supply. This dynamic has been described by some analysts as an "Uberisation" of warfare: low-cost, on-demand, disposable weapons produced and fielded at a pace and scale that traditional defense procurement systems struggle to match.

Cyber Operations and Critical Infrastructure

Alongside physical weapons, cyber operations have become a standard component of modern conflict, capable of disabling power grids, banking systems, communications networks and military command systems without a single soldier crossing a border. Because cyberattacks can be conducted with a high degree of anonymity and deniability, they fit naturally into the grey-zone and hybrid warfare patterns described above, allowing states or their proxies to inflict real damage while complicating attribution and, therefore, retaliation. The blurred line between cybercrime, state-sponsored sabotage and outright acts of war has become one of the most difficult legal and diplomatic problems facing bodies such as this committee, which has in recent years begun to consider dedicated processes on responsible state behaviour in cyberspace.

Information Warfare and the Contest for Legitimacy

Because 4GW theory places the legitimacy of the state, and the loyalty of the population, at the centre of modern conflict, information operations are not a side effect of fourth-generation warfare but one of its primary battlegrounds. Disinformation campaigns, staged atrocity narratives, coordinated social media manipulation and the strategic release of leaked or fabricated documents are used by state and non-state actors alike to shape domestic and international opinion, undermine an adversary's claim to legitimate authority and sustain the morale of a group's own fighters and supporters. The speed and reach of modern digital

platforms mean that a single video or claim, true or false, can shift the political narrative of a conflict within hours, long before traditional verification processes can catch up.

Artificial Intelligence and Autonomous Systems

The integration of artificial intelligence into military decision-making is an emerging concern that this committee has already begun to address, including through resolutions on the risks of incorporating artificial intelligence into the command, control and communications systems associated with nuclear weapons. Autonomous and semi-autonomous targeting systems raise acute questions about accountability under international humanitarian law: if an algorithm, rather than a human commander, selects or prioritises a target, responsibility for an unlawful strike becomes far harder to assign.

The Role of Defense Industries in Modern Conflict

The Scale of the Global Defense Industry

The defense industry is one of the largest sectors in the global economy. It is also one of the most politically significant sectors, having deep roots and connections in international politics, wars, invasions and any other military involvements of countries. According to the SIPRI, world military expenditure reached nearly 2887 billion USD in the year of 2025, observing an increase of 2.9 per cent in real terms over the previous year and the 11th consecutive year of seeing a rise in global military spending. This brought the global military burden, meaning military spending as a share of world GDP, to 2.5 per cent, its highest level since 2009.

Spending trends have varied sharply by region. United States military expenditure declined somewhat in 2025, yet spending in Europe rose by roughly 14 per cent and spending in Asia and Oceania rose by roughly 8.1 per cent, the largest annual increase in that region since 2009, driven substantially by NATO members raising defence budgets and by concerns over regional tensions in the Indo-Pacific. Members of NATO agreed in June 2025 to raise the alliance's collective

spending target to 5.0 per cent of GDP by 2035, a dramatic increase from the 2.0 per cent target agreed a decade earlier, illustrating how quickly defence budgets can shift once states perceive their security environment as deteriorating.

This spending flows substantially into private industry. SIPRI reports that revenues from sales of arms and military services by the hundred largest arms-producing companies in the world rose by 5.9 per cent in 2024, reaching a record 679 billion dollars. The United Nations Secretary-General's 2025 report, *The Security We Need: Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future*, drew on this SIPRI data to warn that such levels of expenditure risk undermining progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals and diverting resources away from long-term human security.

The Military-Industrial Complex Revisited

It is not a new notion that there was always a concern that financially and politically well-organised defense sectors always lead to policy making that is not in the best interest of the general public. President Dwight D Eisenhower was one of the first to voice concern about something he termed the “military industrial complex”. In his farewell address in 1961, Eisenhower, a former military commander, warned of the dangers posed by the military industrial complex, a close and reinforcing relationship between the armed forces, the defense industry including weapons and arms suppliers and the legislators who are responsible for policy making that fund them directly or indirectly. Defence lobbies lobby for procurement decisions, sustain employment in politically influential regions and in some states, altogether blur the line between public security and the private security sector.

This dynamic matters directly for the fourth-generation warfare agenda because protracted, low-intensity conflicts of the kind 4th Generation Warfare theory describes tend to generate long, renewable procurement cycles rather than the short, decisive campaigns imagined by classical strategy. Counter-insurgency, border security, cyber defence and drone warfare each require

continuous investment in surveillance systems, precision munitions and information technology, creating durable commercial relationships between governments and the firms that supply them and a corresponding commercial interest in the continuation, rather than resolution, of instability.

The International Arms Trade

Because modern conflicts are rarely self-contained, the international transfer of weapons plays a central role in shaping how they unfold. SIPRI data shows that the volume of major arms transferred between states increased by 9.2 per cent between the 2016 to 2020 period and the 2021 to 2025 period, with European states more than trebling their arms imports and becoming, for the first time in decades, the largest recipient region in the world, a shift driven overwhelmingly by the war in Ukraine and the broader rearmament of NATO member states.

All around the world, arms which are sold or transferred for one purpose end up being used for another, whether through resale on the grey and black markets, through battlefield capture or diversion during transit. Weapons captured from forces in eastern Ukraine, for example, have reportedly matched equipment observed in use by Russian private military contractors operating in other theatres entirely, illustrating how quickly weapons can move between conflicts once they enter circulation. This is one of the clearest intersection points between the arms trade and the boundary-crossing character of 4th Gen Warfare.

Private Military and Security Companies

Perhaps the most direct link between the defense industry and the changing character of warfare is the growth of private military and security companies, commonly abbreviated as PMCs or PMSCs. Although the practice of hiring soldiers for pay is ancient, modern private military companies emerged in their current corporate form during the second half of the twentieth century, and their use expanded sharply during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, when the United States government employed large numbers of private contractors to provide logistics, protection and, in some documented cases, direct combat support.

The most prominent recent example is Russia's Wagner Group, a private military company that operated in close, though officially denied, coordination with the Russian state. Wagner personnel have been documented operating in Syria, Libya, Mali, the Central African Republic, Mozambique and Ukraine. In Libya, a leaked United Nations sanctions monitors' report found that Wagner deployed roughly 1,200 personnel, including specialised sniper teams, in support of forces loyal to the military commander Khalifa Haftar during the 2019 to 2020 siege of Tripoli. In Mali, following a 2021 military coup, the ruling junta invited Wagner to replace departing French and United Nations forces, and the group has since become central to the junta's counter-insurgency operations, operations that United Nations and African Union monitors have

repeatedly linked to serious human rights violations and to the diversion of weapons intended for national armed forces.

The rise of PMCs of this kind poses distinct challenges for this committee's agenda. First, it complicates accountability: because private contractors frequently operate outside formal military chains of command, and because the states that sponsor them can plausibly deny direct responsibility, violations of international humanitarian law by PMC personnel are far harder to prosecute or even attribute than violations committed by uniformed state soldiers. Second, it undermines existing arms control frameworks: weapons supplied to a state's official military can be diverted to a PMC operating alongside or instead of that military, circumventing the intended end-use restrictions attached to the original transfer. Third, and most fundamentally, it erodes the state's traditional monopoly on the legitimate use of force, one of the very developments that fourth-generation warfare theory identifies as the defining crisis of the era.

The international legal response to mercenary activity has so far been limited. The United Nations has adopted conventions restricting the use of mercenaries, yet major military and economic powers, including the United States, Russia, China and the United Kingdom, have never become parties to the relevant treaty, leaving significant gaps in coverage. A voluntary framework known as the Montreux Document, together with the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers, has been developed to clarify the obligations of states that contract, host or are the nationality of private security companies, but both instruments are non-binding and rely on voluntary compliance, a limitation that many scholars argue leaves them structurally insufficient to address the state-proxy model exemplified by Wagner.

Case Studies

Ukraine

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, which began in February 2022 following the earlier annexation of Crimea in 2014, is in one sense a classic interstate war, fought over territory between the uniformed armies of two sovereign states. Yet it also displays many of the features associated with fourth-generation and hybrid warfare: an opening phase built on unmarked personnel and deniable proxy forces; sustained information campaigns aimed at both domestic and international audiences; extensive use of private military contractors, most notably Wagner Group personnel, operating alongside conventional forces; and, above all, the first large-scale, high-intensity conflict in which both sides have extensively deployed military and commercial drones as core, rather than supplementary, weapons. The conflict demonstrates that even a large, conventional

interstate war is now fought with the technologies and tactics that fourth-generation theorists once associated exclusively with irregular, non-state conflict.

Syria

The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, illustrates the layered, multi-actor character of fourth-generation conflict at its most complex. What began as a domestic uprising against the government of Bashar al-Assad evolved into a war involving the Syrian state, numerous rebel factions of differing ideological orientation, the transnational terrorist group calling itself the Islamic State, Kurdish autonomous forces, and direct or indirect military involvement by Russia, Iran, Turkey, the United States and a range of Gulf states, alongside private military contractors including early Wagner Group deployments. The conflict has been sustained in significant part by external arms transfers and financing, illustrating how deeply the defense industries and foreign policy interests of outside powers can become embedded in what begins as an internal conflict.

The Sahel

Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have, over the past decade, experienced a cascading collapse of state authority in the face of jihadist insurgencies linked to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, compounded by a series of military coups. Mali's post-coup government's decision to expel French and United Nations forces in favour of the Wagner Group illustrates a broader regional pattern: as state militaries lose the capacity, or the international support, to contain an insurgency, governments increasingly turn to private military contractors as a substitute for both national and multilateral security provision. This shift has been accompanied by documented human rights abuses and by growing concern that weapons and revenue flows in the region are increasingly difficult for international monitors to track.

Nagorno-Karabakh

The 2020 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region demonstrated that a mid-sized state with the right combination of imported drone technology could rapidly overturn a long-frozen conflict against a numerically comparable adversary. Azerbaijan's use of Turkish Bayraktar drones and Israeli Harop loitering munitions to destroy Armenia's Soviet-legacy air defences and armoured forces has since become a widely studied example of how defense-industry exports of relatively low-cost precision systems can decisively

shift a regional balance of power, a lesson subsequently absorbed and expanded upon by both sides of the war in Ukraine.

The International Legal and Regulatory Framework

The United Nations Register of Conventional Arms

Established in 1991, the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms is a voluntary reporting mechanism through which member states submit annual data on their imports and exports of major conventional weapons categories, including battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, large-calibre artillery, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships and missiles or missile systems. The Register was designed to build transparency and confidence between states by making arms transfers visible to the international community, reducing the risk that secret arms build-ups could destabilise regional balances of power. Its central limitation is that reporting remains voluntary, and participation has fluctuated considerably over the decades, meaning that the Register offers a useful but incomplete picture of the global arms trade.

The Arms Trade Treaty

The most significant binding instrument governing the conventional arms trade is the **Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)**, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 2 April 2013 by a vote of 154 in favour, 3 against and 23 abstentions, and in force since 24 December 2014. The ATT is the first legally binding treaty of its kind, and it has two central objectives: to establish common international standards for the transfer of conventional weapons and to prevent and suppress the illicit trafficking of those weapons, in order to reduce human suffering and promote responsible conduct among states.

The Treaty applies to eight categories of conventional weapons that mirror those covered by the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, along with related ammunition and small arms and light weapons. Its core operative provisions are found in Articles 6 and 7. Article 6 sets out absolute prohibitions, barring a state from authorising a transfer that would violate a United Nations Security Council arms embargo or that the state knows would be used to commit genocide, crimes against humanity or grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions. Article 7 establishes a risk-assessment obligation, requiring exporting states to evaluate whether a proposed transfer could be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian or human rights law, undermine peace and security or be diverted to unauthorised end users, and to withhold authorisation if that risk cannot be sufficiently mitigated.

The Treaty's practical impact has, however, been constrained by uneven participation. As of the mid-2020s the ATT has well over one hundred states parties, and it enjoys strong support among NATO members, European Union states and many countries across Africa, Latin America and the Pacific. Yet several of the world's largest arms exporters remain outside the Treaty. The United States signed the ATT in 2013 but announced its intention to withdraw in 2019 and has never become a party; Russia and China have likewise declined to join. The Treaty also contains no supranational enforcement mechanism, relying instead on national implementation, self-reporting and peer pressure among states parties, and it contains no explicit provision restricting transfers to non-state armed groups, a gap that is directly relevant to the fourth-generation warfare agenda given the centrality of non-state actors to contemporary conflict.

International Humanitarian Law and Accountability

The body of international humanitarian law built around the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols remains the principal legal framework for regulating the conduct of armed conflict, including the obligation to distinguish between combatants and civilians and to avoid disproportionate or indiscriminate harm. Fourth-generation warfare places severe strain on this framework because it is built around the assumption of organised, identifiable, state-controlled armed forces. When fighters deliberately blend into civilian populations, when private contractors operate under ambiguous chains of command or when lethal decisions are partially automated, the basic categories on which international humanitarian law depends become difficult to apply cleanly, complicating both compliance by responsible actors and accountability for violations.

Efforts to Regulate Private Military Companies

As discussed above, binding international regulation of private military and security companies remains limited. The 2008 Montreux Document on Pertinent International Legal Obligations and Good Practices for States related to Operations of Private Military and Security Companies during Armed Conflict, developed by Switzerland and the International Committee of the Red Cross, restates existing obligations under international law and offers good-practice recommendations for contracting, territorial and home states, but it is explicitly non-binding. The International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers, established in 2010, created a voluntary self-regulatory mechanism and an independent oversight association, yet compliance remains dependent on voluntary company participation. Neither instrument addresses the state-sponsored proxy model exemplified by organisations such as the Wagner Group, in which the line between a private company and an arm of state policy is deliberately obscured.

Questions a Resolution Must Address

1. How should the international community define and monitor the key features of fourth-generation and hybrid warfare, including the roles played by non-state armed groups, disinformation campaigns and cyber operations, without creating definitions so broad that they become unusable?
2. What mechanisms could strengthen transparency and accountability in the global arms trade, particularly with respect to major exporters that remain outside the Arms Trade Treaty and to weapons that are diverted, resold or captured after their initial transfer?
3. Should the United Nations pursue a binding, universally applicable framework to regulate private military and security companies, and if so, how could such a framework address the state-sponsored proxy model exemplified by groups such as Wagner without infringing on the sovereign right of states to organise their own defence?
4. How can existing international humanitarian law be clarified or supplemented to address accountability gaps created by autonomous and semi-autonomous weapons systems, decentralised non-state actors and private contractors operating outside formal chains of command?
5. What role should regional organisations, such as the African Union, the European Union and ECOWAS, play in monitoring and responding to the privatisation of security and the proliferation of armed drones within their regions?
6. How should the committee balance the legitimate security interests of states in acquiring modern defense technology against the risk that rising global military expenditure diverts resources away from development and humanitarian priorities?
7. What confidence-building and verification measures could reduce the risk that emerging technologies, including armed drones and artificial intelligence-enabled targeting systems, further blur the line between war and peace in ways that make conflicts harder to contain or end?

