

Committee Overview

Introduction

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly has existed since the creation of the UN and is one of the six principal organs of the UN, as established by the *Charter of the United Nations* (1945).¹ There are currently six General Assembly Main Committees, each with a different mandate; the General Assembly First Committee considers all matters related to disarmament and international security.² General Assembly resolution 1378(XIV) of 20 November 1959 on “General and Complete Disarmament” was the first resolution co-sponsored by all Member States and considered the question of disarmament the most important question facing the world at the time.³ Consequently, the General Assembly established the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) in 1952 with a general mandate to discuss topics related to disarmament.⁴

In its 26th session, the General Assembly declared the 1970s as a Disarmament Decade.⁵ During this time, additional institutions were established: in 1979 the Conference on Disarmament (CD) was created as the international community’s multilateral negotiation forum on disarmament and in 1980 the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) was created with the purpose of undertaking independent research on questions related to disarmament.⁶ Several other disarmament-related entities and other organizations also report to the General Assembly through the First Committee, such as the regional centers on disarmament and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization.⁷ The ratification of the *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons* (NPT) in 1970 was a fundamental cornerstone in the field of nuclear disarmament.⁸ Efforts leading to this vital agreement started a decade earlier, and an important element in its development took place in the First Committee.⁹ In 1958, when nuclear non-proliferation was on the agenda for the first time, the First Committee recommended the creation of an ad hoc committee studying the dangers of nuclear dissemination, but this resolution failed to be adopted by the General Assembly Plenary.¹⁰ Over subsequent years, this subject was recurrent, and the First Committee eventually adopted a series of resolutions recognizing its central role in pushing negotiations on non-proliferation forward.¹¹

As the only main body with universal membership, the General Assembly is a unique forum for discussion within the UN system.¹² It represents the normative center of the UN and its main role in the maintenance of international peace and security can be summarized in three principal aspects: a generator of ideas, a place of international debate, and the nucleus of new concepts and practices.¹³

The General Assembly First Committee (First Committee) is one of the six Main Committees of the General Assembly. A report is issued to the General Assembly Plenary for each item allocated to a Main Committee.

¹ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945.

² UN General Assembly, *Disarmament and International Security*, 2017.

³ UN General Assembly, *General and Complete Disarmament (A/RES/1378(XIV))*, 1959.

⁴ UN General Assembly, *Regulation, Limitation and Balanced Reduction of all Armed Forces and all Armaments; International Control of Atomic Energy (A/RES/6/502)*, 1952.

⁵ UN General Assembly, *Question of General Disarmament (A/RES/2602 E)*, 1969; UN General Assembly, *Final Document of the Tenth Special Session of the General Assembly (S-10/2)*, 1978.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, p. 63.

⁸ Sciora & Stevenson, *Planet UN*, 2009, pp. 77-78.

⁹ UN Audiovisual Library of International Law, *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, 1968*, 2012, p. 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² UN General Assembly, *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*, 2014.

¹³ Thakur, *The United Nations, Peace and Security*, 2006, pp. 91, 162.

Governance, Structure, and Membership

As outlined in the *Charter of the United Nations*, the General Assembly is comprised of all Member States of the UN.¹⁴ However, Observer status can also be granted to intergovernmental organizations, specialized agencies, and related organizations such as the African Union, World Bank, and states without full UN membership.¹⁵ Currently, the Holy See and the State of Palestine are the only two non-Member States with permanent Observer status.¹⁶ In the General Assembly, each Member State has one equal vote, and unlike the Security Council, no state has the power of the veto.¹⁷

Since its 44th session in 1989, the General Assembly is considered in session the entire year, but the most important time is the General Debate, which takes place from mid-September to the end of December.¹⁸ During the remainder of the year, working group meetings take place and thematic debates are held.¹⁹ Except for decisions on important matters, votes in the General Assembly require a simple majority, and the majority of resolutions are adopted without a vote, illustrating the consensual nature of the General Assembly.²⁰ As determined by the General Assembly Fifth Committee, the budget allocated to disarmament for the biennium 2018-2019 is \$25.6 million and is mainly attributed to multilateral negotiations and deliberations on disarmament and arms limitation.²¹

The First Committee receives substantive and organizational support from three important entities: the General Committee, UNODA, and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.²² The General Committee is comprised of the President and the 21 Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly, as well as the Chairpersons of all the six General Assembly Main Committees; all positions are elected every session on a non-renewable basis.²³ The General Committee's main duty, besides making recommendations on organizational issues, is to deal with the agenda of the General Assembly Plenary and its six Main Committees.²⁴ After receiving a preliminary list of agenda items from the UN Secretariat, the General Committee allocates the different items to each Main Committee.²⁵ The First Committee then votes upon its own agenda based on the allocated agenda items.²⁶ Within the UN Secretariat, UNODA provides "objective, impartial and up-to-date" information, and promotes the implementation of practical measures on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, disarmament in the field of conventional weapons, and the general strengthening of mechanisms and frameworks bolstering disarmament.²⁷ It further encourages norm-setting at the General Assembly, CD, and UNDC.²⁸ Additionally, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management also provides valuable technical secretariat support and acts as the intersection between the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.²⁹

The First Committee works in close cooperation with the UNDC and the CD.³⁰ The CD has a crucial role in addressing issues of disarmament and has been central to negotiations of international agreements such as the NPT.³¹ Unlike the CD, the UNDC is a subsidiary organ of the First Committee and is composed of all 193 Member States.³² By making recommendations to the General Assembly, it leads the formulation of principles and guidelines that will

¹⁴ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945.

¹⁵ UN DPI, *About Permanent Observers*, 2017; UN DPI, *Non-member States*, 2017.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ UN General Assembly, *Proposed Programme Budget for the biennium 2018-2019 (A/72/6 (Sect. 4))*, 2017, p. 5.

²² UN General Assembly, *Disarmament and International Security*, 2017.

²³ UN General Assembly, *General Committee*, 2017.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ UNODA, *About Us*, 2014.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ UN DGACM, *Functions of the Department*, 2014.

³⁰ UN General Assembly, *Disarmament and International Security*, 2017.

³¹ UNOG, *An Introduction to the Conference*, 2014.

³² UNODA, *United Nations Disarmament Commission*, 2014.

subsequently been endorsed by the committee in its own reports.³³ Both bodies report at least once annually to the First Committee.³⁴ Additionally, as a crucial partner with the UN system, civil society organizations have an important relationship with the General Assembly and are often invited to speak at the General Assembly.³⁵

Mandate, Functions, and Powers

The mandate of the General Assembly is established in Article 11, Chapter IV of the *Charter of the United Nations*, and requires the General Assembly to address questions of international peace and security, particularly disarmament.³⁶ This mandate has evolved over time, and the growing range of issues facing the international community ultimately gave the First Committee its focus on disarmament and international security.³⁷ The question of disarmament is organized in seven clusters: nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), disarmament aspects in outer space, conventional weapons, regional disarmament and security, other disarmament measures and security, and the disarmament machinery.³⁸ The mandate of the General Assembly allows it to be a conduit for shared ideas, discussion, and debate that can then become the driver of new policies and norms.³⁹ This is one of the main differences between the General Assembly and the Security Council.⁴⁰ While the Security Council is more concerned with concrete threats to security such as ongoing conflicts, the General Assembly aims to create peace by forming habits of cooperation.⁴¹ It is important to note, however, that the General Assembly considers matters of international security only when the issue is not directly under the consideration of the Security Council.⁴²

The General Assembly and its six Main Committees are the center of the UN System and represent its main deliberative, policymaking, and representative organs; their outcomes thus define new norms that can become treaties or conventions among UN Member States.⁴³ The General Assembly is tasked with initiating studies and making recommendations to promote international cooperation in the political field; encouraging the development of international law; promoting the implementation of cultural, social, and human rights; and promoting fundamental freedoms free from discrimination.⁴⁴ The body often reviews reports issued by “the other principal organs established under the Charter as well as reports issued by its own subsidiary bodies.”⁴⁵ The General Assembly Plenary receives recommendations from the six Main Committees, which can recommend the General Assembly Plenary address the functions or priorities of UN funds and programs.⁴⁶ Once the recommendations are sent to the Plenary Committee, the Plenary then votes on whether to adopt the resolutions as presented.⁴⁷ Although decisions reached by the General Assembly are non-binding, they are often adopted as customary international law, represent the political will of the body, and serve as a good indicator of key international policy norms.⁴⁸ Additionally, the General Assembly can request the Secretary-General or other UN organs to issue a report to one of the Main

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ UN General Assembly, *Disarmament and International Security*, 2017.

³⁵ Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, p. 31.

³⁶ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945.

³⁷ UN General Assembly, *Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (A/RES/47/233)*, 1993.

³⁸ Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, p. 63.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, p. 13.

⁴³ UN General Assembly, *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*, 2014.

⁴⁴ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945; UN General Assembly, *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*, 2013; UN General Assembly, *Statement made by the Chairperson of the Fourth Committee (7 May)*, 2013.

⁴⁵ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945; UN General Assembly, *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*, 2013; UN General Assembly, *Statement made by the Chairperson of the Fourth Committee (7 May)*, 2013; UN General Assembly, *Statement by the Chairperson of the Fourth Committee (7 May)*, 2013.

⁴⁶ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945; UN General Assembly, *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*, 2013; UN General Assembly, *Statement by the Chairperson of the Fourth Committee (7 May)*, 2013; UN General Assembly, *About the General Assembly*, 2016; Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, p. 20.

⁴⁷ UN General Assembly, *About the General Assembly*, 2016.

⁴⁸ Ibid; Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, p. 13.

Committees on a specified question such as the implementation of recommendations made by the General Assembly.⁴⁹

The First Committee is capable of introducing resolutions that initiate new negotiations on arms control and disarmament, which can in turn lead to the creation and funding of agencies or meetings as well as ad hoc committees or working groups that consider a particular question with the purpose of reporting to the General Assembly.⁵⁰ The General Assembly Plenary must also adopt resolutions adopted in the First Committee before they are put into effect.⁵¹ Still, even when adopted by the Plenary, General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding.⁵² Nonetheless, the consensus reached in the First Committee often leads to more concrete international initiatives.⁵³

Recent Sessions and Current Priorities

The strategic framework of the *Biennial Programme Plan*, adopted on 9 March 2016, covers the years 2018-2019 and consists of five subprograms: multilateral negotiations on arms limitation and disarmament, WMDs, conventional arms, information and outreach, and regional disarmament.⁵⁴ In this regard, the main objectives of the First Committee are to: support efforts on agreements toward disarmament, promote non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and other WMDs, facilitate mutual confidence among Member States and the regulation of conventional weapons, increase understanding of Member States and the public on disarmament issues, and promote regional disarmament as a fundamental means toward global disarmament.⁵⁵

During the recent 71st session which began in September 2017, the First Committee adopted a total of 64 resolutions.⁵⁶ All of the seven clusters were discussed, with nuclear disarmament being the most reviewed cluster.⁵⁷ The subprograms laid out in the *Biennial Programme Plan* continue to be priority topics each session, in addition to emerging security issues reflective of the complex security environment the international community is confronted with today, such as nuclear terrorism and the relationship between gender and disarmament.⁵⁸ Among the 64 adopted resolutions there are three major thematic areas examined: cybersecurity, nuclear disarmament, and counter-terrorism efforts.⁵⁹ During its 71st session, the First Committee emphasized the importance of preventing terrorists from acquiring WMDs, and suggested methods for this, such as advising Member States to monitor the illegal delivery and manufacturing within domestic borders, and ratifying other First Committee texts that address this.⁶⁰ General Assembly resolution 71/38 of 9 December 2016 on “Measures to prevent terrorist from acquiring weapons of mass destruction” expands on this idea by stating it would be helpful to compile a report of all measures currently being taken by international organizations to prevent terrorists from acquiring WMDs.⁶¹ Member States review the issues that are faced domestically and outline which measures can be taken to further meet the needs of the international community.⁶²

⁴⁹UN General Assembly, *About the General Assembly*, 2016; Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, pp. 36, 47.

⁵⁰Weiss, *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, 2004, p. 161.

⁵¹UN General Assembly, *About the General Assembly*, 2016.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴UN General Assembly, *Proposed Strategic Framework for the Period of 2018-2019, Part Two: Biennial Programme Plan, Programme 3: Disarmament (A/71/6 (Prog. 3))*, 2016.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶UN General Assembly, *Resolutions: 71st Session*, 2017.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸UNODA, *The United Nations Disarmament Yearbook, Vol. 39 (Part I)*, 2014.

⁵⁹UN General Assembly, *Resolutions: 71st Session*, 2017.

⁶⁰UN DPI, *States Must support National, Global Action to Stop Weapons from Reaching Terrorist Groups, First Committee Hears, as it Approves 7 texts (GA/DIS/3564)*, 2016.

⁶¹UN General Assembly, *Measures to prevent terrorists from Acquiring Weapons of Mass Destruction (A/RES/71/38)*, 2016.

⁶²Ibid.

The First Committee completed its 72nd session on 2 November 2017.⁶³ In total, the First Committee submitted a total of 58 documents to be voted by the General Assembly Plenary.⁶⁴ Among the successes, the committee was able to agree on a final draft for the *Implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and of Their Destruction* which further unifies the collective UN system's commitment to chemical weapons disarmament.⁶⁵ The body engaged in in-depth conversation on two operative clauses of the document, both of which were concerned with the reports and actions that have taken place in Syria.⁶⁶ Other items that the committee discussed ranged from peace in the Indian Ocean, the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone Treaty, and how science and technology can be used in international security and disarmament.⁶⁷ A focus on peacekeeping, particularly financing of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti and the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, was also evident throughout the 72nd Session.⁶⁸

Conclusion

Disarmament has been an important issue for the UN and for the achievement of international peace since its founding.⁶⁹ As a place where new ideas are shaped, the General Assembly has the ability to introduce standards and norms to promote disarmament and eventually a more peaceful world; nevertheless, it has been argued that the First Committee has not been able to achieve its full potential and has only been reaffirming its resolutions year after year with no introduction of new or improved substantive work.⁷⁰ The General Assembly First Committee is likely to continue its pursuit of international peace and security while continually seeking consensus in collaboration with the whole of the international community.⁷¹

⁶³ UN DPI, *Closing Sessions, First Committee Approves Draft on Chemical Weapons Convention, Sending Total of 58 Texts to General Assembly (GA/DIS/3594)*, 2017.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ UN General Assembly, *Documents of the First Committee (A/C.1/72/INF/1)*, 2017, pp. 2-3.

⁶⁸ UN General Assembly, *Resolutions of the 72nd Session*, 2018.

⁶⁹ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945.

⁷⁰ Reaching Critical Will, *UN General Assembly First Committee*, 2014.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Annotated Bibliography

Charter of the United Nations. (1945). Retrieved 23 August 2017 from: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/index.shtml>

The Charter of the UN is the most foundational document of the United Nations. The Charter establishes the General Assembly and its role within the UN system, and determines the mandate and priorities of each of the principal organs of the UN. Understanding the powers and function that has been granted to the General Assembly and the other principal organs is an important and necessary task that this source will provide, and delegates will benefit from understanding the role of the General Assembly and how its mandate differs from other UN bodies.

Switzerland, Permanent Mission to the United Nations. (2011). *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. Retrieved 23 August 2017 from: http://www.unitar.org/ny/sites/unitar.org.ny/files/UN_PGA_Handbook.pdf

This publication undertaken by the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN is another contribution by a Member State of introductory information about the UN system. The General Assembly is a central focus of this handbook. A detailed description of its organization, structure, rules, and working methods can be found. Further providing information specific to all six Main Committees, this handbook offers a unique source of information to delegates to understand the work of the General Assembly and its place within the UN system.

Thakur, R. (2006). *The United Nations, Peace and Security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Ramesh Thakur, a renowned commentator on the UN, examines the UN from a contemporary perspective and looks at it from new angles such as human security, focusing on questions related to international peace and security. By doing so, he critically analyzes the use of force by the UN with the intention of making it more effective in the light of today's emerging threats. His particular analysis of the role of the Security Council versus the General Assembly's approaches to peace and security are a well-explored study of how different approaches to a global issue yield differing political results. His book is a valuable guide to the UN and will be of useful reading to delegates by offering a critical academic analysis of the General Assembly's role and successes.

United Nations, General Assembly. (2014). *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly* [Website]. Retrieved 20 July 2018 from: <http://www.un.org/en/ga/about/background.shtml>

This web site of the General Assembly provides an excellent and relatively brief introduction to the General Assembly. It also highlights some of the current efforts to reform and revitalize the General Assembly, which is a shared priority of both the Assembly itself and the UN Secretary-General. Delegates should use this as a starting point to understand what actions the General Assembly can take, how it has operated in the past, and how they can work to achieve consensus on international issues.

United Nations, General Assembly, Seventy-first session. (2016). *Proposed Strategic Framework for the Period of 2018-2019, Part Two: Biennial Programme Plan, Programme 3: Disarmament (A/71/6(Prog.3))*. Retrieved 16 September 2017 from: [http://www.undocs.org/A/71/6\(prog.3\)](http://www.undocs.org/A/71/6(prog.3))

The Proposed Strategic Framework is drafted biennially and outlines the priorities of each year. In the section on disarmament, there are two main segments, which are Overall Orientation and Legislative Mandates. Under the overall orientation, five priority subprograms are listed, which include multilateral negotiations on arms limitations and disarmament, WMDs, conventional arms, information and outreach, and regional disarmament. Delegates will gain more knowledge on the General Assembly's current priority for the year from this document and gain a good understanding of the UN's upcoming priorities in their research with this information.

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I. Addressing the Use of Chemical Weapons

Introduction

Chemical weapons are defined by the United Nations (UN) as toxic chemicals, munitions, devices, and/or any equipment specifically used to cause death or harm others through the release of chemicals on other individuals.⁷² Chemical weapons can be delivered or dispersed via air strike, artillery shells, ballistic missile, cruise missile, or unmanned aerial vehicle (drone), and cause indiscriminate damage on their targets.⁷³ The use of chemical weapons in modern times began with the First World War, when poisonous gases such as chlorine, phosgene, and mustard gas were used to increase casualties on the battlefield beyond the damage inflicted by traditional weapons.⁷⁴ In 1925, the international community signed *The Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare*, commonly referred to as the Geneva Protocol, as a first step towards prohibiting the use of chemical weapons in warfare.⁷⁵ The Geneva Protocol prohibited the use of chemical weapons in warfare but did not prohibit the development, production, or stockpiling of chemical weapons.⁷⁶

During the Cold War era, the world system saw an increase in the production of chemical weapons, with an estimated 25 Member States then in possession of chemical weapon arsenals.⁷⁷ Since the end of World War II, there was a rapid decline in the use of chemical weapons, however reports of chemical weapons use have continued in long-running conflicts, most recently in the Syrian Arab Republic.⁷⁸ Regional groups, including the African Union, are developing new methods of addressing chemical weapons through the creation of regional anti-chemical weapons frameworks, but chemical weapons stockpiles persist as does the threat of their use.⁷⁹ The UN and regional groups continue to collaborate on methods to address the threat of chemical weapons, including their use by non-state actors.⁸⁰

International Framework

The *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling, and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction* (1992), also known as the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), is the framework document for chemical weapons disarmament globally; it establishes a complete ban on the development, production, stockpiling, and use of chemical weapons.⁸¹ With 24 articles and three annexes on chemicals, verification, and confidentiality, the CWC provides an extensive framework to globally eliminate chemical weapons.⁸² The CWC put into place a prohibitory norm that remains applicable under all circumstances, including that of armed conflict.⁸³ Moreover, the treaty provides for extensive verification measures, including provisions for inspections and for

⁷² OPCW, *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction*, 1997.

⁷³ Kimball, *Chemical Weapons: Frequently Asked Questions*, 2018.

⁷⁴ UNODA, *Chemical Weapons*, 2018.

⁷⁵ League of Nations, *1925 Geneva Protocol: Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of the Bacteriological Methods of Warfare*, 1925.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ UNODA, *Chemical Weapons*, 2018.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ OPCW, *National Authorities from Africa Review Implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and Regional Needs*, 2017; Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, *Weapons of Terror: Freeing the World of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Arms*, 2006.

⁸⁰ OPCW, *National Authorities from Africa Review Implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and Regional Needs*, 2017.

⁸¹ Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, *Weapons of Terror: Freeing the World of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Arms*, 2006, p. 127.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Zanders, *The Chemical Weapons Convention and Universality: A Question of Quality Over Quantity?*, 2002, p. 23.

investigations on the use of chemical weapons.⁸⁴ Verification measures include on-site inspections of national facilities to verify States Parties' declarations pursuant to Articles III, IV, V and VI of the Convention, and the Verification Annex.⁸⁵ In its first 15 years, the main contribution of CWC to international peace and security has been the abolition of the majority of chemical weapons stockpiles accumulated during the Cold War era.⁸⁶

There have been a number of strong resolutions since the adoption of the CWC.⁸⁷ General Assembly resolution 55/283 (2001) was adopted to create a formalized agreement between the UN and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in order to support an increased capacity for the OPCW's investigative activities and to allow the UN to strengthen international safeguard policies.⁸⁸ In December 2017, the UN General Assembly adopted its latest resolution on the use of chemical weapons, resolution 72/43, which focuses on fully implementing the CWC.⁸⁹ This resolution explicitly calls for the destruction of chemical weapons, as previous UN resolutions have not explicitly mentioned destruction of chemical weapons to this extent.⁹⁰ It also called for the continued destruction of Libya's chemical weapons, and the full implementation of the CWC, despite persisting restrictions on the OPCW's capacity to fully investigate all cases of chemical weapons usage or stockpiling.⁹¹ Additional framework resolutions have also been produced by other UN bodies, including the Security Council in resolution 2118 (2013), which was adopted in response to the chemical attacks in Syria and requested that the Secretary-General submit to the UN recommendations on the role of the UN in mitigating future attacks.⁹²

Role of the International System

The General Assembly First Committee plays an important role in discussing the use of chemical weapons as it provides a universal forum for negotiations on disarmament topics which impact international peace and security.⁹³ The General Assembly regularly adopts resolutions on the ratification status of the CWC and how to ensure its full and effective implementation, as seen most recently in November 2017 when it passed a resolution to increase the accountability of perpetrators of chemical weapons-based violence.⁹⁴ Working specifically on the issue of chemical weapons with the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), the General Assembly is able to receive specific thematic guidance and strategy on chemical weapon disarmament in order to develop efficient means of disarmament.⁹⁵ The UNODA further supports the relationship between the UN and the OPCW through providing support programs such as the "multi-phase lessons-learned" exercises to increase operational preparedness of the Secretary-General's Mechanism utilized as an investigative tool in the usage of chemical weapons in Syria.⁹⁶

Since 1997, the OPCW has conducted 2,800 inspections at 200 chemical weapon-related sites and over 850 industrial sites in 77 States parties.⁹⁷ The actions of OPCW are strengthened through close cooperation with the

⁸⁴UN CD, *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction (A/47/27)*, 1992.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷UN Security Council, *Resolution 2118 (2013) (S/RES/2118(2013))*, 2013.

⁸⁸UN General Assembly, *Cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (A/RES/55/283 (2001))*, 2001.

⁸⁹UN General Assembly, *Implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (A/RES/72/43)*, 2017.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²UN Security Council, *Resolution 2118 (2013) (S/RES/2118(2013))*, 2013.

⁹³UN General Assembly, *Implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (A/RES/72/43)*, 2017; UN General Assembly, *Disarmament and International Security (First Committee)*, 2014.

⁹⁴UN DPI, *Closing Session, First Committee Approves Draft on Chemical Weapons Convention, Sending Total of 58 Texts to the General Assembly*, 2017.

⁹⁵UNODA, *Chemical Weapons*, 2018.

⁹⁶UNODA, *Fact Sheet: United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic*, 2018.

⁹⁷UN CD, *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction (A/47/27)*, 1992.

United Nations, as is made evident by General Assembly resolution 71/250 titled “Cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.”⁹⁸ Due to negotiation from members, the OPCW is now also able to name Member States responsible for chemical weapon attacks, allowing for a level of accountability.⁹⁹ Until this change in OPCW operations, chemical weapons inspectors under the auspices of the OPCW operated in a position where they could gather all information and determine whether or not chemical weapons were used, but could not publicly place responsibility on a single Member State or actor.¹⁰⁰ The work of the OPCW has been such that it has received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013, and former-Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated that the UN “is honored to work hand-in-hand with the OPCW to eliminate the threat posed by chemical weapons for all people and for all time.”¹⁰¹

In addition to the work of the General Assembly, UNODA, and OPCW, other UN bodies and specialized agencies also support emergency preparedness and response to the use of chemical weapons.¹⁰² The World Health Organization (WHO) has a consistently revised and updated publication guide on healthcare response to the deliberate use of chemical agents that affect health, and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has made several statements on the impact of chemical weapons on children, most recently after the April 2017 attack in Idlib, Syria.¹⁰³ Civil society and regional frameworks have also played an important role in the fight against chemical weapons.¹⁰⁴ Organizations such as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the EU Non-Proliferation Consortium, and the International Union for Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) have been providing the UN with social and technical support on chemical weapons since the early 1970s.¹⁰⁵ Regionally, the European Union has its own restrictive sanctions-based measures against individuals and groups who utilize chemical weapons, and continues to strongly support the work of inter-regional talks in the case of chemical weapons usage.¹⁰⁶

Stockpiling of Chemical Weapons and their Destruction

The OPCW has been notably successful at destroying stockpiles of chemical weapons, with over 96% of the world’s existing stockpiles being destroyed as of 2017.¹⁰⁷ However according to the Arms Control Association, of the 193 Member States that are party to the CWC at least eight of them have admitted to stockpiling chemical weapons since the creation of the CWC, and some of these stockpiles either remain or their destruction has not been verified.¹⁰⁸ The destruction of existing chemical weapons is costly and complex.¹⁰⁹ In order to eliminate chemical weapons safely, extensive precautions are needed, such that the toxic chemicals and “precursors,” or substances that aid in the production of chemical weapons, do not cause further harm.¹¹⁰ During the 1950s and 1960s, states used disposal methods such as dumping decommissioned chemical weapons in the ocean, or burying them.¹¹¹ However these tactics proved insufficient when buried chemical weapons resulted in soil contamination and chemical weapons previously disposed of in the sea were caught by fisherman or washed up on beaches, harming civilians.¹¹² The environmental impact of insufficient chemical weapons destruction has been noted as an on-going concern, particularly in the case of degradation of chemical weapons over time.¹¹³ In response, the OPCW has recommended

⁹⁸UN General Assembly, *Cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (A/RES/71/250)*, 2017.

⁹⁹Marcus, OPCW Chemical Watchdog Gains Power to Assign Blame, *BBC*, 2018.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹UN DPI, *Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)*, 2013.

¹⁰²UNICEF, *Press release: Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake on reports of chemical weapons attacks on children and families in Syria*, 2017.

¹⁰³WHO, *Emergencies preparedness, response*, 2004;

¹⁰⁴Trapp, *Civil Society, Chemical Industry and the Chemical Weapons Convention*, 2018.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶European Council, *Use of chemical weapons in Syria: EU adds 4 persons to sanctions list*, 2018.

¹⁰⁷OPCW, *20 Moments*, 2017.

¹⁰⁸Kimball, *Chemical and Biological Weapons at a Glance*, 2018.

¹⁰⁹Kimball, *Chemical Weapons: Frequently Asked Questions*, 2018.

¹¹⁰Di Justo, *How to Destroy a Stockpile of Chemical Weapons*, 2013; OPCW, *Destruction Technologies*, 2018.

¹¹¹Di Justo, *How to Destroy a Stockpile of Chemical Weapons*, 2013.

¹¹²Di Justo, *How to Destroy a Stockpile of Chemical Weapons*, 2013; OPCW, *Destruction Technologies*, 2018.

¹¹³OPCW, *Environmental Concerns*, 2018.

that chemical weapons be disposed of primarily through closed incineration in extremely hot furnaces, which requires expensive scrubbing of smoke; or by neutralization, wherein chemical reactions render the weapon de-weaponized.¹¹⁴ These processes require technical expertise, funding, and time, and even after destruction is complete relevant production capabilities must also be destroyed.¹¹⁵ Researchers have proposed new means of neutralization, such as the use of microorganisms or brine-reduction systems, but more work is needed to ensure the feasibility and affordability of new approaches.¹¹⁶

Given the difficulty and danger in transporting chemical weapons from stockpile to incinerator, incinerators often need to be constructed and placed directly by the stockpiling facility.¹¹⁷ While the US Army has built new incinerators as a step towards destroying its remaining chemical weapons stockpiles, the estimate is that American stockpiles will only be destroyed by the year 2023.¹¹⁸ Some Member States like the Russian Federation have requested financial and technical assistance in the construction of weapon incinerators for their remaining stockpiles.¹¹⁹ These requests for funding, support are often accompanied by complicated political agreements and negotiations at the international level that are needed in order to provide necessary support.¹²⁰ The destruction of chemical weapons in Syria in 2014 required a “highly complex political agreement between the Russian Federation and the United States,” in addition to complementary intergovernmental agreements at the UN before the destruction process could begin.¹²¹ During the 2014 General Assembly thematic debate on weapons of mass destruction, representatives from UNODA also noted the need for long-term capacity-building in order to promote and implement norms on chemical weapons.¹²² Therefore while ensuring the destruction of stockpiles of chemical weapons remains a costly and technically challenging process, international cooperation and support remain central in order to ensure that the destruction of these weapons is done efficiently, safely, and sustainably.¹²³

Case Study: Chemical Weapon Use in the Syrian Civil War

The Syrian Civil War broke out in 2011 in response to the wave of uprisings in the region that became known as the Arab Spring.¹²⁴ The war in Syria drew the attention of many international actors, including the Russian Federation, Iran, and the US.¹²⁵ As tensions worsened within Syria, President Bashar Al Assad launched a chemical weapon attack on fighters and civilians on 21 August 2013.¹²⁶ At least 3600 civilians were either wounded or killed by the 2013 chemical weapons attacks and demonstrated symptoms including shortness of breath, disorientation, eye irritation, blurred vision, nausea, vomiting, general weakness, and eventual loss of consciousness.¹²⁷ There have also been claims that as many as 1,400 were killed from this chemical attack, including more than 400 children.¹²⁸ After confirming the use of the chemical weapons in Syria, the US and the Russian Federation agreed to the *Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons* (2013).¹²⁹ As part of this deal, Syria has cooperated with the international community by providing information on its chemical weapons stockpiles to OPCW and UN experts.¹³⁰ Syria also acceded to the CWC on 14 October 2013 and has commenced destruction activities with the aid of the OPCW and UN inspectors that will facilitate the verification and destruction process.¹³¹ However, despite this

¹¹⁴Di Justo, *How to Destroy a Stockpile of Chemical Weapons*, 2013; OPCW, *Destruction Timeline*, 2018.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Di Justo, *How to Destroy a Stockpile of Chemical Weapons*, 2013.

¹¹⁷Kimball, *Chemical Weapons: Frequently Asked Questions*, 2018.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰UN DPI, *Mission to ‘Remove and Destroy’ Chemical Weapons in Syria Unprecedented, but Reports of Chlorine Gas Use Troubling, First Committee Hears (GA/DIS/3510)*, 2015.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴Britannica Encyclopedia Online, *Syrian Civil War*, 2018.

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Charbonneau & Nichols, UN Confirms sarin used in Syria attack; US, UK, France blame Assad, *Reuters*, 2013.

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹United States Department of State, *Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons*, 2013.

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹OPCW, *Press Release on the Advance Team in Syria*, 2014.

progress, sarin gas attacks against civilians have occurred in April 2017 and 2018, and the Security Council has not adopted a resolution addressing these most recent attacks due to use of the veto.¹³²

Some international experts have argued that the case of Syria demonstrated that even with strong international tools such as the CWC, there is a clear need to increase the accountability of individuals and regimes who have used chemical weapons and to improve the investigative abilities of the international community.¹³³ The General Assembly debate on improving the response to chemical weapons attacks was schismatic, with members expressing concern that the OPCW Technical Secretariat lacked capacity to fully verify inconsistencies and discrepancies in national declarations on the destruction of chemical weapons, such as with Syria.¹³⁴ Additionally, determining accountability has become an increasingly complex issue when non-state actors claim responsibility for use of chemical weapons in conjunction with regime usage, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh)'s release of sarin gas in the Syria case.¹³⁵ Divisions such as these also challenge the consensual nature of international agreements in the GA and present continued challenges to international-level political dialogue on chemical weapons that must be addressed.¹³⁶

Conclusion

Despite the historical effectiveness of the OPCW and the CWC, recent issues in eliminating chemical weapons and the usage of chemical weapons against civilians have emerged.¹³⁷ The threat that chemical weapons present to global peace and security remains, and it is up to the General Assembly to examine the capacity of existing mechanisms to quickly, effectively, and affordably addressing the issue of chemical weapons usage through the forum of international diplomacy.¹³⁸

Further Research

In considering how the international community could best work to prevent the use of chemical weapons, delegates should consider the following questions: How can the General Assembly be more effective in addressing the use of chemical weapons? How can the UN best harness the expertise of its bodies to further address the use of chemical weapons? Are there other ways that the General Assembly can support and enhance chemical weapons safety besides direct assistance to Member States? How can we mitigate the effect of chemical weapons in conflict areas? What role can civil society organizations and regional bodies play in supporting the UN's efforts to fully mitigate chemical weapons? How can the UN intercede in complex political situations where there is a risk of chemical weapons usage?

¹³²Almukhtar, Most Chemical Attacks in Syria Get Little Attention: Here Are 34 Confirmed Cases, *The New York Times*, 2018; Eastem Ghouta: What Happened and Why, *Al Jazeera*, 2018.

¹³³UN DPI, *Closing Session, First Committee Approves Draft on Chemical Weapons Convention, Sending Total of 58 Texts to the General Assembly*, 2017.

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷UN General Assembly, *Implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (A/RES/72/43)*, 2017.

¹³⁸Ibid.

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League of Nations. (1925). *Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare*. Geneva, 17 June 1925. Retrieved 6 July 2018 from: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=58A096110540867AC12563CD005187B9>

The Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare, known as the Geneva Protocol, is the first document designed to address the use of chemical weapons and is essential to understanding the global community's historical efforts to address chemical weapons. The Geneva Protocol does not prohibit the development, production, or stockpiling of chemical weapons unlike future documents, however it did provide a preliminary example of international law on chemical weapons. It is important for delegates to know the Geneva Protocol in order to understand the foundational document of the international community's work towards the nonproliferation of chemical weapons.

United Nations, Conference on Disarmament. (1992). *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction*. Retrieved 5 March 2018 from: https://www.opcw.org/fileadmin/OPCW/CWC/CWC_en.pdf

This document serves as the basis for later General Assembly resolutions which address the use of chemical weapons and is the first document to build off the Geneva Protocol and provide further suggestions for action. The Chemical Weapons Convention is the hallmark treaty on chemical weapons and essential for understanding the current approaches to chemical weapons disarmament. This document also discusses stockpiles and their proper disposal, and introduces mechanisms to properly dispose of chemical weapons. Furthermore, this document discusses the varying methods for inspection and calling the need to establish an office or body specializing in the inspection of chemical weapon stockpiles, which served as a motivation behind the creation of OPCW.

United Nations, General Assembly, Fifty-fifth session. (2001). *General and complete disarmament (A/RES/55/33)* [Resolution]. Adopted on the report of the First Committee (A/55/559). Retrieved 4 March 2018 from: <http://www.undocs.org/A/RES/55/33>

This document serves as an important backbone for research regarding chemical weapons since it is one of the first General Assembly resolutions to address chemical weapons via general disarmament. Furthermore, this resolution shows how the General Assembly began discussing this issue in 2001 without going into much depth and is an important anchor to use in comparison with later resolutions on the matter. This document is important for delegate research as it calls on chemical and non-chemical weapon holding Member States to disclose their weapon stocks.

United Nations, General Assembly, Seventy-second session. (2017). *Implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (A/RES/72/43)* [Resolution]. Adopted on the report of the First Committee (A/72/409). Retrieved 5 March 2018 from: www.undocs.org/A/RES/72/43

Building off of the Geneva Protocol and OPCW, this is the latest version of the General Assembly First Committee resolution set out to specifically target the implementation mechanisms of the theories outlined in the 1925 Protocol. This resolution provides one of the most recent perspectives on the General Assembly's approach to addressing the use of chemical weapons, and specifically recognizes the role of emerging technology on chemical weapons. This resolution further focuses on implementation draws from recent chemical weapon prohibition failures and successes, and delegates will find this document particularly useful to guiding their research on the current status of chemical weapons disarmament.

Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission. (2006). *Weapons of Terror: Freeing the World of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Arms*. Retrieved 20 April 2018 from: https://ycsg.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/weapons_of_terror.pdf

This report discusses both short- and medium-term steps for achieving a complete ban on weapons of mass destruction, advocating for a cooperative approach by the entire international community. The paper includes a summary of the nature of threats from chemical weapons, as well as the unilateral, bilateral, and regional responses to them. The report is an important source for delegates since it addresses key issues, such as the role of companies and the business sector in export controls of chemical materials, and states' trade and finance interdependence. It also addresses the private sector's influence in their willingness to comply or to adhere to the CWC, as well as the role of the UN in the enforcement of the CWC and in achieving universality.

United Nations, Security Council, 7038th meeting. (2013). *Security Council Resolution 2118 (S/RES/2118)* [Resolution]. Retrieved 4 March 2018 from: [http://www.undocs.org/S/RES/2118\(2013\)](http://www.undocs.org/S/RES/2118(2013))

On 27 September 2013, Security Council Resolution 2118 on the elimination of Chemical Weapons used by the Assad Regime during the Syrian Civil War was adopted unanimously. This resolution is important since it highlights a unanimous agreement by the international community to eliminate the use of chemical weapons. Delegates will find this resolution useful to understanding the recent dialogue on chemical weapons elimination, and the current status of international dialogue on the issue.

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II. The Role of Emerging Technologies in International Security and Disarmament

*“We live in an era of unprecedented technological advances... These have implications for all aspects of modern life, including how we work and the overall security environment. It is clear that what we once considered frontier issues have moved rapidly to the front door.”*¹³⁹

Introduction

The role of emerging technologies in international security and disarmament has been a focal point of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly First Committee since 1988, when the topic was first added to the General Assembly’s agenda.¹⁴⁰ The 1990 report of the Secretary-General titled “Scientific and Technological Developments and Their Impact on International Security” became the foundational document for the role of emerging technologies in international security and disarmament within the General Assembly First Committee; it identified five emerging technologies that became the foundation for the topic.¹⁴¹ These original five categories identified were: nuclear technology, space technology, materials technology, information technology, and biotechnology.¹⁴² Since the early post-Cold War period when these developments were initiated, the focus of technologies was expanded beyond nuclear and space technologies to also include newer fields, such as information technology.¹⁴³ In addition to the expansion of information technology, emerging technologies surrounding devices such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) have yet to receive international frameworks harnessing their potential.¹⁴⁴ While action has been taken on specific examples of emerging technologies, the General Assembly First Committee continues to discuss and issue reports on the field as a whole, focusing on how different fields of emerging technologies interact and interconnect in international security and disarmament.¹⁴⁵

International and Regional Framework

The role of emerging technologies in international security and disarmament has grown in significance since the founding of the UN and became a permanent item on the General Assembly First Committee’s annual agenda in 1988.¹⁴⁶ The original five categories defined in the 1990 report of the Secretary-General entitled “Scientific and Technological Developments and Their Impact on International Security” (A/45/568) are still discussed, but increasingly in a modern and evolving context.¹⁴⁷ As nuclear technologies, especially nuclear explosive technology, have evolved since 1990 and especially during the early 2000s, the need for an updated definition of emerging technologies continues, despite the continued global movement towards global nuclear disarmament.¹⁴⁸ Emerging materials technology describes the development of new or improved materials used for a variety of purposes, primarily for military uses.¹⁴⁹ The range of technology that has grown the most in variety and importance since the publication of the report in 1990 is the category of information technology, as evidenced through numerous UN documents within the past 15 years, specifically General Assembly resolution 58/199 of 2004 titled “Creation of a global culture of cybersecurity and the protection of critical information infrastructures” and the

¹³⁹UN Secretary-General, *Secretary-General's remarks to Turtle Bay Security Roundtable: Managing the Frontiers of Technology (as delivered) on 23 March 2018, in New York City, 2018.*

¹⁴⁰UNODA, *The Role of Science and Technology in the context of International Security and Disarmament*, 2017.

¹⁴¹UN General Assembly, *Scientific and Technological Developments and Their Impact on International Security: Report of the Secretary-General (A/45/568)*, 1990.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁴³UN General Assembly, *DISARMAMENT: New trends in science and technology: Implications for international peace and security*, 1991, pp. 1-2.

¹⁴⁴*The use of armed drones must comply with laws*, International Committee of the Red Cross, 2013.

¹⁴⁵UN General Assembly, *Role of science and technology in the context of international security and disarmament (A/RES/72/28)*, 2017.

¹⁴⁶UNODA, *The Role of Science and Technology in the context of International Security and Disarmament*; UN General Assembly, *Scientific and Technological Developments and Their Impact on International Security: Report of the Secretary-General (A/45/568)*, 1990, p. 3.

¹⁴⁷UN General Assembly, *Scientific and Technological Developments and Their Impact on International Security: Report of the Secretary-General (A/45/568)*, 1990, pp. 5-20.

¹⁴⁸Union of Concerned Scientists, *Earth-Penetrating Weapons*, 2005.

¹⁴⁹UN General Assembly, *Scientific and Technological Developments and Their Impact on International Security: Report of the Secretary-General (A/45/568)*, 1990, pp. 12-14.

note by the Secretary-General (A/70/174) of 2015 entitled “Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security,” which were among the first UN documents focusing on information technology.¹⁵⁰

In addition to action taken on the five categories outlined in the 1990 report, numerous treaties have been created to limit the weaponized and often negative implications of these emerging technologies.¹⁵¹ However, aside from the 1983 *Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons*, which restricts certain anti-personnel mines and bans blinding laser beams and non-detectable fragments, there are no overarching frameworks for materials technology.¹⁵² While the creation of such treaties and conventions has helped guide emerging technologies, fields that have emerged more recently, such as information technology, have yet to receive such international frameworks despite the UN Secretary-General’s call for the creation of one.¹⁵³ Moreover, the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), often colloquially referred to as “drones,” is covered by some international laws but no international treaty for their use has been negotiated.¹⁵⁴ On a regional level, the European Union (EU) updated and expanded its framework for the civilian use of UAVs in 2017.¹⁵⁵

Role of the International System

The regulation of emerging technologies in international security and disarmament ranges from the General Assembly First Committee, which provides a forum for global political dialogue and high-level recommendations; to the Security Council, which serves to perform specific actions in response to on-going conflict; to specialized agencies that focus on a specific technology or region.¹⁵⁶ General Assembly resolution 72/28 of 11 December 2017 entitled “Role of science and technology in the context of international security and disarmament” and report of the Secretary-General entitled “Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security” (A/72/315) act as the most prominent recent documents and ensure that the role of emerging technologies remains at the forefront of the General Assembly First Committee’s agenda.¹⁵⁷ In October 2017, the General Assembly First Committee hosted a meeting involving the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and representatives from other UN stakeholders to discuss the benefits and threats of new and emerging technologies, such as autonomous weapons systems.¹⁵⁸ The UN Security Council is the other UN organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security; however, it focuses on more specific cases while the General Assembly First Committee provides strategic visions and frameworks surrounding the role of emerging

¹⁵⁰ UN General Assembly, *Creation of a global culture of cybersecurity* (A/RES/57/239), 2003; UN General Assembly, *Creation of a global culture of cybersecurity and the protection of critical information infrastructures* (A/RES/58/199), 2004; UN General Assembly, *Creation of a global culture of cybersecurity and taking stock of national efforts to protect critical information infrastructures* (A/RES/64/211), 2010; UN General Assembly, *Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security* (A/RES/71/28), 2016; UN General Assembly, *Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security: Note by the Secretary-General* (A/70/174), 2015.

¹⁵¹ UN General Assembly, *Scientific and Technological Developments and Their Impact on International Security: Report of the Secretary-General* (A/45/568), 1990, p. 3; UNOOSA, *United Nations Treaties and Principles on Outer Space*, 2002; UNOOSA, *Biological Weapons: The Biological Weapons Convention: Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction*; OPCW, *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction*, 1993.

¹⁵² Arms Control Association, *Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) at a Glance*, 2017.

¹⁵³ NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence, *United Nations*; Khalip, U.N. chief urges global rules for cyber warfare, *Reuters*, 2018.

¹⁵⁴ *The use of armed drones must comply with laws*, International Committee of the Red Cross, 2013.

¹⁵⁵ European Council & Council of the European Union, *Updated aviation safety rules and new rules on drones approved by the Council*, 2017.

¹⁵⁶ UN General Assembly, *Disarmament and International Security (First Committee)*; UN Security Council, *The Security Council*.

¹⁵⁷ UN General Assembly, *Role of science and technology in the context of international security and disarmament* (A/RES/72/28), 2017; UN General Assembly, *Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security* (A/72/315), 2017.

¹⁵⁸ UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, *Disarmament Machinery Must Sharpen Tools to Harness Largely Ungoverned Game-Changing New Weapons, Security Experts Tell First Committee*, 2017.

technologies in international security and disarmament.¹⁵⁹ For example, the Security Council has recently adopted resolutions focusing on certain conflicts and specific emerging technologies, such as the development and proliferation of improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, in Security Council resolution 2365 of 2017.¹⁶⁰

The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) has existed since 1982 and has, as technologies have evolved, changed in both name and mandate to fit the changing security environment.¹⁶¹ In addition to advising the General Assembly First Committee, UNODA provides organizational support, including through transparency initiatives and confidence-building measures.¹⁶² The Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA SALW) is also hosted under the auspices of UNODA.¹⁶³ The UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) further supports the General Assembly First Committee by presenting research to the committee annually and helping the General Assembly find viable strategies in achieving international disarmament.¹⁶⁴

Information technology is currently overseen by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).¹⁶⁵ ITU focuses on matters ranging from climate change to cybersecurity.¹⁶⁶ To strengthen regional support for information technology, ITU has thirteen field offices located in Asia, the Americas, Arab States, Asia and Pacific, Europe, and the Commonwealth of Independent States.¹⁶⁷ In 2017, ITU started to host an annual conference titled “AI for Good Global Summit,” which aims to identify practical applications of artificial intelligence to achieve the SDGs.¹⁶⁸ In addition to regional ITU offices, regional organizations, such as the European Union Agency for Network and Information Security and the Science and Technology Division of the African Union, have worked to raise awareness among local populations about the benefits and threats of emerging information technologies.¹⁶⁹ These regional organizations also work to standardize and protect measures of information and cybersecurity.¹⁷⁰

Some regional organizations, such as the African Union (AU) and EU, have specific cybersecurity frameworks.¹⁷¹ In 2014, the *African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection* was adopted and became the AU’s information technology framework.¹⁷² During the AU’s thirty-second ordinary session in January 2018, the organization decided to make cyber security a focal point of the AU’s *Agenda 2063* (2013) and created the Africa Cyber Security Collaboration and Coordination Committee.¹⁷³ The EU’s approach has been more legalistic, especially through the Directive on security of network and information systems (NIS Directive), which was adopted in 2016 and provides legal measures that aim to increase the EU’s cyber security.¹⁷⁴

Private enterprises have also embraced the value of emerging technologies and have become leaders in these fields. Google and SpaceX are two companies that have become global leaders in information and space technologies

¹⁵⁹UN General Assembly, *Role of science and technology in the context of international security and disarmament (A/RES/72/28)*, 2017; UN Security Council, *Resolution 2231 (2015)*, 2015; UN Security Council, *Resolution 2365 (2017)*, 2017.

¹⁶⁰UN Security Council, *Resolution 2231 (2015)*, 2015; UN Security Council, *Resolution 2365 (2017)*, 2017.

¹⁶¹UNODA, *About Us*, 2018.

¹⁶²*Ibid.*

¹⁶³UNODA, *Programme of Action on small arms and its International Tracing Instrument; International Action Network on Small Arms, About IANSA and IANSA Resources*, 2018.

¹⁶⁴UNIDIR, *The Institute*, 2018.

¹⁶⁵ITU, *About International Telecommunication Union (ITU)*, 2018.

¹⁶⁶ITU, *Key Areas of Action*, 2018.

¹⁶⁷ITU, *Regional Presence*, 2018.

¹⁶⁸ITU, *AI for Good Global Summit 2018*, 2018.

¹⁶⁹European Union Agency for Network and Information Security, *About ENISA*, 2018; African Union, *Science and Technology Division*, 2018.

¹⁷⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁷¹European Commission, *Digital Single Market: Policy: The EU cybersecurity certification network*, 2017; African Union, *African Union Commission and Council of Europe Join Forces on Cybersecurity*, 2018.

¹⁷²African Union, *African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection*, 2014.

¹⁷³African Union, *Executive Council: Thirty-Second Ordinary Session: Decisions*, 2018, p. 7.

¹⁷⁴European Commission, *Digital Single Market: Policy: The Directive on security of network and information systems (NIS Directive)*, 2018.

respectively.¹⁷⁵ Although Google and SpaceX are private firms, the technological progress these two companies continue to drive is crucial to the role of emerging technologies in international security and disarmament, as demonstrated in their increased influence in international high-level discussions.¹⁷⁶ Google has a long-standing partnership with the UN through the UN Foundation and has partnered with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to increase the accessibility of tools to manage natural resources.¹⁷⁷ The influence of private enterprises furthermore underlines the importance of achieving SDG 17, emphasizing public-private partnerships in achieving sustainable development through emerging technologies.¹⁷⁸

Influence of Virtual Technologies

The growth of information technology has had a major impact on the world in the twenty-first century, not only in people's daily lives but also in international security and disarmament.¹⁷⁹ For example, crisis mapping, which is the real-time mapping of local crises on a publicly-accessible map online, has enabled humanitarian organizations to connect digitally, streamlining and improving relief efforts in regions that have been hit by natural disasters, such as after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, or humanitarian crises, as was evident in Libya in 2011.¹⁸⁰ While the largely unlimited access to the Internet is a positive force, societies' increasing reliance on digital connectedness has created a significant vulnerability to governments and populations.¹⁸¹ As of 2017, only 38% of Member States had a cybersecurity strategy and another 12% were in the process of developing one.¹⁸² Although the use of cyberspace continues to increase, the most recent General Assembly resolution on cybersecurity, resolution 64/211 (2010), contained an annex outlining a voluntary list of actions for Members States, including determining which national sectors are most vulnerable to a cyber-attack, identifying formal and informal venues of information-sharing among national bodies of government, and other methods by which Member States can strengthen their cybersecurity.¹⁸³ While there have been regional efforts to strengthen cybersecurity, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s 2013 *Tallinn Manual*, neither the Security Council nor the General Assembly have taken concrete action to overcome the security challenges posed by information technology.¹⁸⁴

While information technology can be used for positive efforts, non-state actors and criminal groups have also benefitted from the dissemination of this technology.¹⁸⁵ Non-state actors have not only used information technology to facilitate terrorist attacks, but have also used this technology for recruitment, radicalization, and financing of terrorist activities.¹⁸⁶ Cyberattacks against information technologies and critical infrastructure have highlighted the vulnerability of emerging information and communication technologies.¹⁸⁷ Further underlining this growing issue, a 2015 note by the Secretary-General (A/70/174) states that if these threats remain unaddressed they may pose a threat to international peace and security.¹⁸⁸ As such, the note provides an extensive list of measures Member State should

¹⁷⁵Google, *Our company*, 2018; SpaceX, *Company*, 2017.

¹⁷⁶Fung, *SpaceX wants to beam Internet down to Earth. Here is how it will start.*, 2018.

¹⁷⁷UN Foundation, *What We Do: Partners: Google Foundation*, 2013; Google, *Data-driven, human-focused philanthropy – powered by Google*, 2017; UN News, *UN agency and Google collaborate on satellite data tools to manage natural resources*, 2016.

¹⁷⁸UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform: Goal 17: Targets & Indicators*, 2018.

¹⁷⁹Meier, *New information technologies and their impact on the humanitarian sector*, 2011, p. 1239.

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 1241, 1244-1248, 1250-1254.

¹⁸¹ITU, *Global Cybersecurity Index 2017*, 2017, p. 1.

¹⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁸³UN General Assembly, *Creation of a global culture of cybersecurity and taking stock of national efforts to protect critical information infrastructures (A/RES/64/211)*, 2010.

¹⁸⁴NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, *Tallinn Manual Process*; NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, *United Nations*.

¹⁸⁵UN Security Council, *Information and communications technologies (ICT)*.

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷UN General Assembly, *Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security: Note by the Secretary-General (A/70/174)*, 2015, p. 6.

¹⁸⁸*Ibid.*

take to combat and prevent the criminal use of cyber space.¹⁸⁹ Final recommendations are also provided and highlight the importance of protecting cyberspace on both national as well as the international level.¹⁹⁰

Overcoming Security Challenges from Unmanned Aerial Vehicles

Another security challenge is posed by UAVs, the use of which is becoming more common in a variety of UN initiatives, ranging from providing humanitarian assistances through the UN International Children's Fund to assisting in UN peacekeeping operations.¹⁹¹ For humanitarian purposes, UAVs can assist in three ways: reconnecting groups and population centers with aid who have been cut off by damaged infrastructure, providing remote sensing capabilities, and connecting remote locations with Wi-Fi.¹⁹² For peacekeeping missions, unarmed surveillance UAVs have been deployed to provide an additional security measure for local populations.¹⁹³ Armed drones used in targeting makes the practice considerably more accurate, thus reducing the potential for collateral damage and the deaths of innocent civilians.¹⁹⁴ Yet as it became obvious in 2017 through the publication of armed UAV statistics, scrutiny and accountability mechanisms are crucial in maintaining accuracy and keeping civilian deaths at a minimum.¹⁹⁵

Additionally, while UAVs have the ability to provide considerable humanitarian assistance, armed UAVs may pose an unregulated threat, which is why UNODA published the document entitled "Study on Armed Unmanned Aerial Vehicles" (2015).¹⁹⁶ According to the report, "UAVs have unique characteristics that make them particularly susceptible to misuse in comparison to other technologies."¹⁹⁷ This potential for misuse can be attributed to the low cost of UAVs, their small size and precision, and minimal risk to their operators.¹⁹⁸ Consequently, the lack of oversight and accountability surrounding the use of drones is a concern that contrasts an individual's right to privacy and general accessibility of drones against the ability to protect the general population against the misuse of unarmed drones or the general use of weaponized drones.¹⁹⁹ Assessing legal and policy implications surrounding armed UAVs, the study raises concerns pertaining to human rights and international security, and asks questions about technological advancements that may render armed UAVs fully autonomous.²⁰⁰

Conclusion

The role of emerging technologies in international security and disarmament remains critical in framing and assessing security challenges.²⁰¹ Since the publication of the report of the Secretary-General titled "Scientific and Technological Developments and Their Impact on International Security" in 1990, the role of emerging technologies has moved to the forefront of the General Assembly First Committee's agenda and has remained an annual agenda item.²⁰² Nonetheless, certain technologies, such as information technologies, have been more impactful on Member States than other categories due to their important roles in the growing global interconnectedness.²⁰³ Consequently, the role of emerging technologies in international security and disarmament must remain an integral part of the General Assembly First Committee's agenda and consensus mechanisms.

¹⁸⁹Ibid, pp. 7-12.

¹⁹⁰Ibid, p. 13.

¹⁹¹UN News, *FEATURE: Does drone technology hold promise for the UN?*, 2017.

¹⁹²Ibid.

¹⁹³Ibid.

¹⁹⁴Shane, *The Moral Case for Drones*, 2012.

¹⁹⁵Borger, *US air wars under Trump: increasingly indiscriminate, increasingly opaque*, 2018.

¹⁹⁶UNODA, *Study on Armed Unmanned Aerial Vehicles: Prepared on the Recommendation of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters*, 2015.

¹⁹⁷Ibid, p. v.

¹⁹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹⁹Ibid, pp. 50-52.

²⁰⁰Ibid, p. 39.

²⁰¹UNODA, *Reorienting towards the future: Integrating state-of-the-art weapons and ammunition management into DDR programmes*, 2018.

²⁰²UN General Assembly, *Role of science and technology in the context of international security and disarmament (A/RES/72/28)*, 2017.

²⁰³Meier, *New information technologies and their impact on the humanitarian sector*, 2011, p. 1239.

Further Research

Seeing the potential but also negative effects emerging technologies have on international security and disarmament, how can the UN implement effective frameworks harnessing the benefits of these technologies while limiting negative consequences? Even though cooperation on drafting an effective cybersecurity framework within the UN has been difficult, how can the UN contribute to helping Member States protect critical information infrastructure? Considering the potential for weaponizing emerging technologies, such as UAVs, how can the General Assembly First Committee strike a balance between encouraging military innovation and protecting civilian populations?

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International Telecommunication Union. (2017). *Global Cybersecurity Index 2017* [Report]. Retrieved 28 April 2018 from: https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/str/D-STR-GCI.01-2017-PDF-E.pdf

As a major emerging aspect of information technology, cybersecurity is a topical issue of discussion in the UN. The ITU's annual report assesses the current status of cybersecurity globally. In addition to providing annual key findings, this document also presents a global and regional outlooks and suggests best practices for government actors. This document is important as it frames a crucial aspect of one of the main emerging technologies and streamlines global and UN efforts on the issue. Delegates should specifically focus on the key findings, global outlook, and regional outlooks when using this document, as they provide an up-to-date overview of the current cybersecurity environment.

United Nations, General Assembly, Twenty-second session. (1968). *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (A/RES/2373 (XXII))*. Adopted on the report of the First Committee. Retrieved 1 March 2018 from: [http://www.undocs.org/A/RES/2373\(XXII\)](http://www.undocs.org/A/RES/2373(XXII))

This treaty is the hallmark treaty for the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Signed in 1968, the treaty limits the possession of nuclear weapons to the five permanent Members of the UN Security Council. In addition to limiting the spread of nuclear weapons, parties to this treaty benefit from their membership by gaining access to a legal exchange of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. Although the treaty limits production, possession, and proliferation of nuclear weapons, it does not aim to achieve global nuclear disarmament. Nevertheless, this treaty acts as the foundation of the global non-proliferation regime and underlines the significance of the 2017 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use of Nuclear Weapons.

United Nations, General Assembly, Forty-fifth session. (1990). *Scientific and Technological Developments and Their Impact on International Security: Report of the Secretary-General (A/45/568)*. Retrieved 1 March 2018 from: <http://undocs.org/A/45/568>

This report of the Secretary-General was the first document created on the topic of emerging technologies, as was discussed by the General Assembly during its forty-third session in 1988. This report provided the framework overview of the role of emerging technologies in international security and disarmament. Although published at the end of the Cold War, the document continues to remain relevant and underline ongoing flaws within the international system's response to emerging technologies in international security and disarmament. The report also highlights technology trends in five selected areas: nuclear technology, space technology, materials technology, information technology, and biotechnology.

United Nations, General Assembly, Seventieth session. (2015). *Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security (A/70/174)*. Retrieved 27 April 2018 from: <http://www.undocs.org/A/70/174>

Recognizing the vulnerability of critical infrastructure to cyber threats, this note provides an extensive list of measures Member States should take to combat and prevent the criminal use of cyber space. The list includes steps to ensure responsible state behavior, confidence-building measures, capacity-building and international assistance, and the international legal framework pertaining to cybercrimes. The document also provides final recommendations, which highlight the importance of protecting cyberspace on both national and international levels.

United Nations, General Assembly, Seventy-second session. (2017). *Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security: Report of the Secretary-General (A/72/315)*. Retrieved 3 March 2018 from: <http://undocs.org/A/72/315>

Following General Assembly resolution 71/28 (2016), 23 Member States submitted points they deemed to be important in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security. The aspects that are highlighted and discussed in this report underline positive aspects of information and telecommunications, such as the promotion of human rights through a free cyberspace, to negative consequences of information technology, such as

distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks. Delegates will find this report useful as the growth of the field of information and telecommunications has moved information technology to the forefront of emerging technologies in the context of international security.

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