

2024 Topic Background Guide

Wichita Area Model United Nations (WA-MUN)

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Additional links to the Delegate Handbook and research sites are also posted on the
webpage.**

Topic 1: Prevention of an arms race in outer space

The use of space is critical to global society. Modern militaries rely heavily on man-made satellites in orbit around the earth, which are used for communication, targeting and global positioning systems. [Satellites are also critical to civilian operations such as telecommunications and scientific research](#). All countries rely upon space-based technology in some way, even if they are not space-faring themselves. Due to the global vantage point provided simply by being in space and the unique and global dangers space weapons pose, a debate has emerged over the past few decades on whether militaries should be permitted to station weapons in orbit. The fledgling commercial space industry, eager to develop near-earth orbit and mine the asteroid belt for resources, also has a vested interest in keeping space peaceful and developing clear international law governing military use of space.

The weaponization of space has long been a concern of the United Nations. In 1963, the General Assembly adopted a resolution calling on all Member States to refrain from placing [nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction](#) in orbit or from installing such weapons on celestial bodies. The General Assembly also noted that the principles of the United Nations Charter, particularly those prohibiting the use or threat of use of force, apply in space as well.

In 1967, the [Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies](#) (commonly known as the “Outer Space Treaty”) entered into force. This treaty is the main instrument of international law governing the use of outer space and tracks the language of the 1963 resolution by banning the stationing of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in orbit or on any celestial body. It does not ban the stationing of conventional weapons in space or prohibit the use of conventional weapons launched from the surface of the Earth to destroy objects in space. The Outer Space Treaty currently has 104 States Parties, including all Member States with significant space-faring capability. Another 24 Member States have signed but not ratified the treaty.

Subsequent efforts to develop and enforce multilateral treaties regarding this topic have not met with success. In 1979, Member States proposed the adoption of the [Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies](#) (commonly known as the “Moon Treaty”). The treaty never gained significant traction, in part because it would have required Member States to share space-derived resources and the means for extracting such resources. It has been ratified by only 14 Member States, none of which have space-launch capability.

In 1985, the [Conference on Disarmament](#), where this topic has also been debated at length, established the Ad Hoc Committee on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space. The Ad Hoc Committee disbanded in 1994 after failing to generate any formal agreements. Discussion on this topic in the First Committee has continued through the end of the Cold War to the present day. In recent resolutions related to this topic, the First Committee encouraged the adoption of verifiable measures to prevent an arms race in space, including the creation and implementation of better transparency and confidence-building measures among space-faring States.

The first way that an arms race in space could erupt is by deploying existing nuclear weapons such as inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) in orbit. The nuclear deterrence that has prevented the use of nuclear weapons in combat since the detonations at Hiroshima and Nagasaki is based

on each side's ability to destroy the other should any nuclear attack take place. Because space-based nuclear weapons would have a much faster response time than even ICBMs, one side's implementation of such weapons would threaten the balance of power and could potentially lead to an arms race of ever-faster and more responsive nuclear satellites.

However, space weapons could also be something as simple as a [satellite that drops rods of concrete rebar](#). When dropped from 60+ miles up, virtually any object that can survive the heat stress of atmospheric reentry can become a deadly missile. The extent to which conventional weapons in space should be banned is therefore a key part of the global debate on this issue. The destruction of one satellite, whether it is from a space-based weapon or a surface-to-space missile, could create a chain reaction of explosions, filling low-earth orbit with debris and rendering it unusable for any satellites or human and robotic exploration missions. This situation, known as [Kessler Syndrome](#), would have a catastrophic effect on global society. While some global positioning and other highly specialized satellites orbit high enough to be out of reach of such a disaster, the vast majority of currently operating satellites are in low-earth orbit, including most scientific and weather satellites, constellations of communications satellites such as the Iridium satellite telephone system, and the International Space Station. Losing all of these capabilities in short succession would have far-reaching effects such as cutting communications from remote regions of the Earth and a decreased ability to predict natural disasters. Low-earth orbit is also by far the cheapest orbit to launch a satellite in and has a number of advantages, such as a short orbital period to cover more of the Earth with one satellite. The economic cost to shift satellite development and launch to higher orbits would be enormous.

Recently, this debate has become more urgent due to signs that some States are gearing up to wage space-based warfare or to develop the capacity to [destroy another State's assets in space](#). The United States military has earmarked \$2 billion for developing space weapons in 2016, citing concerns that its military has become so dependent on satellites that they are an "Achilles' heel" that must be better protected. In 2007, the People's Republic of China destroyed one of their own satellites with a surface-to-space missile, 530 miles above the Earth's surface. The United States has also destroyed one of its own satellites in similar fashion, and Russia has successfully tested its own anti-satellite missile.

In 2017, the General Assembly voted for stronger laws to hold violators of the Outer Space Treaty accountable. The General Assembly identified the possibility of a larger arms race that could occur in Outer Space, particularly given the rising availability of dual-use technologies in space, such as high-energy lasers. Numerous countries had reservations against the Chinese-Russian draft treaty on the placement of weapons in outer space, especially given the lack of a clear definition of an outer space weapon and no clear path forward on anti-satellite weapons.

The future of Outer Space is still uncertain, with some states calling for greater international regulation. The Space Preservation Treaty, which would ban all weapons in space, including conventional weapons, was proposed to the General Assembly in the mid-2000s; to date it has not been signed by any Member State. In 2008 and again in 2014, at the Conference for Disarmament, Member States proposed the adoption of a "draft treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space and of the threat or use of force against outer space objects." This treaty has yet to come before the General Assembly. Given the lack of a definition of what constitutes an "outer space weapon", the continued efforts to prevent the militarization of outer space may find

it difficult to enforce any resolutions made within the General Assembly First Committee. The relationship between space-faring nations and non-space-faring nations may also be strained if enforcement of previous treaties fails.

Questions to Consider:

- What constitutes a “weapon” in space? How can an instrument limiting the use of weapons in space carve out room for civilian, scientific and other benign operations to continue to operate?
- How successful have the current treaties regarding arms in outer space? What can be done to make up for their shortcomings?
- Are new multilateral agreements necessary or advisable to incorporate into the framework of agreements banning or otherwise limiting space weaponization? How can the United Nations improve the implementation and integration of existing agreements that deal with space weapons?
- What lessons can be learned from the failure of the Moon Treaty to gain any significant traction?

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Topic 2: Protection of Migrants

People move their permanent place of residence for a variety of reasons. Sometimes this movement is voluntary, as in the case of migrant workers who seek better employment opportunities abroad while other movements are involuntary, such as people who choose to leave because they believe their home has become too dangerous, or because of forced expulsion of a population by military forces—a relatively common occurrence. Regardless of whether their movement is voluntary or involuntary, those who leave their home country to seek either permanent or temporary residence elsewhere are referred to under the global term “migrant.” This term thus encompasses a wide range of people in a wide range of circumstances and conditions, which can occasionally complicate policy considerations. Migrants often find themselves in vulnerable situations, as they are not citizens of the receiving countries and subsequently can be subject to human rights violations.

To best address the needs of migrants, it is important to understand the makeup of this population. The growth of the migrant population around the globe highlights the continued need to address this topic. It is estimated that there are 272 million migrants globally as of 2019, compared to 51 million in 2000 and 258 million in 2017. The migrant population increased from 2.3 percent to 3.5 percent of the global population since 1980. Of the 2019 migrant population, 48 percent were women, 38 million were children, and 164 million were workers. While many of these individuals migrate by choice, there are those who are forced to travel out of necessity. War, famine, and economic uncertainty are just a few reasons migrants leave their homes. In 2018, the UNHCR reported that, globally, the number of forcibly displaced persons was over 70 million. This includes 26 million refugees, 3.5 million asylum seekers, and over 41 million internally displaced persons.

While migration has been common for centuries, it was enshrined as a human right in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) in 1948. Article 13 of the Declaration states that every person has a right to leave his or her own country, as well as to return to that country. However, the Declaration (along with other international human rights law) does not provide an obligation on the part of the receiving State to accept the migrant as a resident, except in narrow cases where asylum is validly sought and granted. Nevertheless, the receiving State does have obligations to protect even an undocumented migrant’s human rights, such as the right to be free from torture or forced labor. Migration affects nearly every country in the world, as a sending, transit, or receiving country, so there is global interest in migrant issues.

Drawing on the guidance from the Population Division, the United Nations developed the [International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families](#) in 1990. This Convention clarified that international human rights law applies to migrants regardless of whether they are in a transit State or receiving State. The Convention also categorized migrant workers as documented or non-documented. A documented migrant worker is one whom the receiving State has officially authorized to live and work there. The Convention recognizes the need to secure the protection for the rights of every migrant, regardless of their documentation status. However, the Convention grants certain rights—such as the right to form associations and trade unions, and the right to participate in public affairs—only to documented workers.

In 2013, the United Nations built upon its work through the implementation of the Secretary-General's eight-point plan of action regarding migrants. This plan of action, adopted by the General Assembly, called broadly for the protection of all human rights of migrants. In addition, it aims to improve public perception of migrants, better integrate migration into the United Nations development agenda and adopt a more evidence-based approach to assisting migrants.

In September 2014, the General Assembly adopted the Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals, which called for the protection of migrants' labor rights and workplace safety in Goal 8. Additionally, a February 2015 International Migration Meeting brought together high ranking officials within ECOSOC to discuss the position of international migration within the Secretary-General's eight-point migration plan. These officials indicated that integrating migration into the broader international sustainable development agenda is of critical importance, especially at a time when many countries are having difficulty implementing beneficial migration policies at the national level and coordinating their efforts with those of other countries.

The [UN Migration Agency \(IOM\)](#) defines migrants as persons who are moving or have moved across international borders or within a State away from their habitual place of residence regardless of: the person's legal status, whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary, what the causes for the movement are, or what the length of stay is. The IOM was established in 1951 and is the leading inter-governmental organization tasked with addressing migration. Its mission is to promote international cooperation on migrant issues, ensure the humane management of migration, assist in the search for solutions to the problems faced by migrants, and to provide assistance to migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons. In 2016, IOM and the United Nations came to an agreement through [Resolution 70/976](#) making IOM a specialized agency of the United Nations. This agreement made the coordination of IOM's expertise and the United Nations's international legislation ability more effective. This move came in conjunction with the United Nations' updated focus on the need for closer cooperation and responsibility-sharing to address the large-scale movement of refugees and migrants which affect all Member States.

The General Assembly convened in 2016 to address these concerns. These meeting's outcomes were highlighted in the [Secretary-General's report: In safety and dignity: addressing large movements of refugees and migrants](#). This report designated three major pillars on which international cooperation would be needed to address the issues faced by migrants: "to uphold safety and dignity in large movements of both refugees and migrants, global compact on responsibility-sharing for refugees, global compact for safe, regular and orderly migration." These overarching pillars highlight how international cooperation hinges on Member States not only working together, but accepting responsibility for migrants needs whether they are the country of origin or the receiving country. Building upon this report, Member States recognized the positive contributions of migrants to sustainable and inclusive development and adopted several commitments through the [New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#). These commitments include protecting the safety, dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms of all migrants, regardless of their migratory status.

Building upon this, Member States convened in 2018 for an international conference on migration in Morocco. The outcome of the conference was the development of the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#). The commitments outlined in the Compact include: strengthening

labor rights for migrant workers, improving migration data as a basis for evidence-based policies, saving lives and establishing international efforts to locate missing migrants.

Questions to consider:

- To what extent should receiving countries be obligated to protect the human rights of undocumented migrants? Of temporary labor migrants?
- What is your country's role in and position on the Global Compact on Migration?
- How can measures to protect migrants be better tailored to their unique vulnerabilities and susceptibility to human rights abuses?
- What steps should the United Nations take in order to better integrate protection of migrants into the overall issue of sustainable development?

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