

FORUM: Disarmament and International Security (DISEC)
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What is DISEC and how does it work?

The United Nations General Assembly First Committee, also known as the Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC), is one of the six main committees of the UN General Assembly. DISEC focuses on disarmament, global challenges, and threats to peace that affect the international community, seeking solutions to these issues within the framework of international security. The committee's work is divided into three stages: general debate, thematic discussions, and action on drafts. During the general debate, member states discuss the agenda items, followed by thematic discussions on specific topics such as nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction, and regional disarmament. Finally, the committee votes on resolutions and decisions formulated during the session.

Throughout its history, DISEC has been involved in several key events and debates. One of its landmark moments was the adoption of the very first General Assembly resolution in 1946, which established a commission to address the problems raised by the discovery of atomic energy¹. Another significant event was the adoption of Resolution 1378 in 1959, which was co-sponsored by all member states at the time and focused on disarmament and international security¹. DISEC has also played a crucial role in the discussions leading to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). The committee continues to address contemporary issues such as cyber warfare, the militarization of outer space, and the proliferation of conventional weapons, reflecting its ongoing commitment to maintaining international peace and security.

Background

The Assad political dynasty began with Hafez al-Assad, who seized power in a 1970 coup and ruled Syria with an iron fist until his death in 2000. Hafez's regime was characterized by authoritarianism, a strong security apparatus, and a focus on maintaining the Ba'ath Party's control. His son, Bashar al-Assad, unexpectedly succeeded him after the death of his older brother, Bassel, in a car accident. Initially seen as a potential reformer, Bashar's rule quickly became marked by the same authoritarian practices as his father's. The Assad family maintained power through a combination of political repression, strategic alliances, and manipulation of sectarian divisions within Syria.

The Syrian Civil War, which began in 2011, dramatically altered the political and territorial landscape of Syria. Triggered by the Arab Spring protests, the conflict started with peaceful demonstrations against Bashar al-Assad's regime, which were met with violent crackdowns. This led to an armed rebellion, with various factions, including the Free Syrian Army, Islamist groups, and Kurdish forces, fighting against the government. The war saw significant foreign intervention, with Russia and Iran supporting Assad, while the United States, Turkey, and Gulf states backed different rebel groups. The conflict resulted in massive casualties, widespread destruction, and a humanitarian crisis, displacing millions of Syrians both internally and externally.

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an Islamist militant group, emerged as a significant force during the Syrian Civil War. Initially formed as an offshoot of al-Qaeda, HTS has attempted to rebrand itself as a more moderate entity, though it remains a designated terrorist organization by many countries. Following the fall of Assad's government in December 2024, HTS played a crucial role in establishing a transitional government in Syria. This new government, led by HTS and supported by Turkey, faces the challenge of uniting a fractured nation and gaining international legitimacy. The acting prime minister, Mohammed al-Bashir, has promised to lead Syria through a transitional period until March 2025, with the goal of stabilizing the country and preparing for elections.

The territorial integrity of Syria has been repeatedly challenged by external actors throughout the conflict. Turkey has established a significant presence in northern Syria, supporting various rebel groups and conducting military operations against Kurdish forces. Iran has also exerted influence, particularly in the southern and eastern regions, through its support of Hezbollah and other Shiite militias. The United States has maintained a military presence in northeastern Syria, primarily to combat ISIS and support Kurdish forces. Additionally, Israel has conducted numerous airstrikes against Iranian targets in Syria, further complicating the situation. These interventions have fragmented Syria's territory, creating de facto autonomous zones outside the control of the central government.

Efforts to restore Syria's political and territorial integrity have been ongoing but face significant obstacles. The United Nations Security Council's Resolution 2254, adopted in 2015, outlines a roadmap for a political transition in Syria, including a ceasefire, the establishment of an inclusive transitional government, and the drafting of a new constitution. However, the implementation of this resolution has been hindered by the conflicting interests of external powers and the fragmented nature of the Syrian opposition. Recent diplomatic efforts, such as the Riyadh Meetings in January 2025, have focused on supporting Syria's reconstruction and lifting sanctions, but achieving a lasting peace and restoring Syria's sovereignty remains a complex and challenging task.

Current Situation

Domestically, Syria is navigating a complex and fragile transition following the collapse of the Assad regime in December 2024. The new transitional government, led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), faces the daunting task of uniting a deeply divided nation. The humanitarian situation remains dire, with nearly 15 million Syrians requiring health services and 13 million facing acute food insecurity. The transitional authorities are working to restore basic services, rebuild infrastructure, and address the needs of displaced populations. However, the presence of various armed groups and ongoing violence in certain regions, such as the coastal areas and Homs, continue to pose significant challenges to establishing stability and law and order.

Geopolitically, Syria's situation is influenced by the interests and actions of multiple external actors. Turkey has established a significant presence in northern Syria, supporting various rebel groups and conducting military operations against Kurdish forces. Iran continues to exert influence through its support of Hezbollah and other Shiite militias, particularly in the southern and eastern regions. The United States maintains a limited military presence in northeastern Syria, primarily focused on counterterrorism efforts and supporting Kurdish forces. Additionally, Israel has conducted numerous airstrikes against Iranian targets in Syria, further complicating the geopolitical landscape. These interventions have fragmented Syria's territory, creating de facto autonomous zones and challenging the central government's authority.

Militarily, the situation in Syria remains volatile, with ongoing clashes between various factions and external interventions. Despite a US-brokered ceasefire near Manbij, tensions between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Turkish-backed Syrian National Army forces persist. The presence of jihadist groups, including ISIS and HTS, continues to pose a threat to Syria's security and territorial integrity. The transitional government, led by HTS, is working to consolidate its control and establish a unified military command, but the presence of multiple armed groups with conflicting agendas complicates these efforts. Additionally, the threat of Israeli airstrikes and violations of the 1974 Disengagement Agreement over the Golan Heights further undermines Syria's sovereignty. The path to restoring Syria's political and territorial integrity remains fraught with challenges, requiring careful navigation of both domestic and international dynamics.

Barriers to Sovereignty

The preservation and re-affirmation of Syria's integrity face significant barriers, particularly due to the Levant's regional significance. The Levant, encompassing Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and Palestine, is a region of immense geopolitical importance due to its strategic location, historical significance, and natural resources. Syria's

position within this region makes it a focal point for various regional and international powers. The ongoing conflict has exacerbated sectarian divisions and created power vacuums, which external actors have exploited to advance their own interests. This has led to a fragmented political landscape, with different areas controlled by various factions, undermining efforts to restore a unified Syrian state.

Militarily, the presence of multiple armed groups with divergent agendas poses a significant barrier to Syria's integrity. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), backed by the United States, control large swathes of northeastern Syria, while Turkish-backed Syrian National Army forces hold territories in the north. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an Islamist militant group, controls parts of Idlib province and has established a transitional government following the fall of the Assad regime. The ongoing clashes between these groups, along with the persistent threat of ISIS, create a volatile security environment. Furthermore, the involvement of external military forces, such as Russian and Iranian troops supporting the Syrian government, complicates efforts to establish a unified military command under the transitional government. This fragmented military landscape undermines efforts to restore Syria's territorial integrity and achieve lasting peace.