

BACKGROUND GUIDE OF THE DISEC

Composed by Andrew Herrup



WMIDMUN-XXII

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Dear Sponsors and Delegates,

Welcome to the twenty-second session of the William & Mary Middle School Model United Nations Conference, and to the Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC). My name is Andrew Herrup, and I am excited to meet you, to hear your perspectives on international law and politics, and to see you explore the United Nations (UN) as you tackle two DISEC topics.

I am a senior at the College majoring in Biochemistry and minoring in Sociology. I participated in WMIDMUN once as a delegate as this conference introduced me to Model UN. As I look back in my final year I am certain that joining MUN in middle school and continuing on in college is one of the best decisions I have ever made. Outside of Model UN, I enjoy watching sports, playing guitar, and cooking/baking. I love all things music, Star Wars, science, etc.

As your director, I expect rigorous debate, which I value equally to your written performance. As you begin to form opinions and debate continues in committee, I want to see cooperation and leadership from you. Given the goal of mirroring the UN, I expect diplomatic and respectful behavior. Finally, your positions should reflect a close legal analysis of the case at hand, with some opinions tied to the country you are representing. However, you are not bound exclusively to the perceived alliances/biases of your assigned country. Following these guidelines will provide a healthy environment for your investigation of the topics and your production of solutions. I remind you to adhere to the requirements for position papers, so you do not do unnecessary work, but please research the topics thoroughly. Feel free to contact me to relay any questions or concerns—I know MUN can feel daunting, but you all got this! I look forward to meeting you at WMIDMUN XXII.

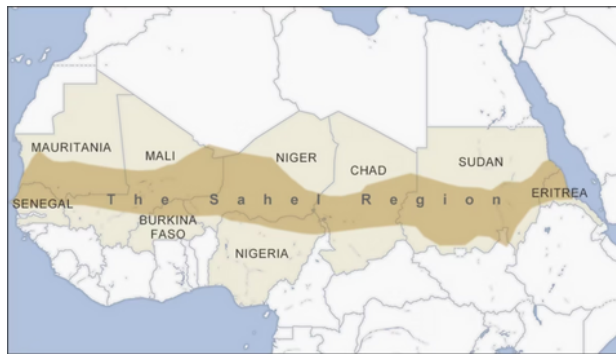
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BACKGROUND 1.0



Topic I: Arms Trafficking in the Sahel

The Sahel region of Africa is comprised of Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal has a rich and storied history. Lying at the crossroads of the largely impassible Sahara Desert and the humid sub-Saharan jungles, the Sahel has played an important role in the development and history of Africa. From the 9th to the 18th century onward, the region was a seat of power for the continent, with various decentralized kingdoms gaining power, prestige, and wealth by controlling the trans-Saharan trade networks. In the 19th century, following the Berlin conference and the scramble for Africa, in which colonial European powers carved up the African continent, the Sahel largely was controlled by colonial France until its decolonization in the 1960s.



In recent decades there has been an increase in concern regarding the trade, sale, and smuggling of weapons across the Sahel region. The reasons for this increase have been the subject of much scholarly and political debate, and though they are certain, there are several likely causes. None of these possible reasons exclude one another, and the true root cause for the increase in illegal arms smuggling is likely a combination of all or many of these explanations, each of which is explained in more detail in the background guide.

The first explanation is that many states within the Sahel region as a whole have experienced a large amount of political instability. Not only have many of the countries in the regions been caught in cycles of military dictatorships followed by coups, counter-coups, and various more dictators, but in many Sahel nations, even those associated with increased freedoms, the ruling and political classes have failed to address the spiraling security conditions. The ruling classes see only the risks, both politically and personally, to investing in unstable regions in their nations, and fail to see the benefit stabilizing investment could offer. This causes a cycle of violence, where increased instability, particularly in regions far from a nation's direct seat of power, causes increased violence, which causes increased stability, and so on. Additionally, constantly changing governments, heads of states, and ruling coalitions can create an image of chaos, and weaken the overall strength of a central government. This weakening of the central government increases barriers to implementing necessary social programs, which causes the cycle to continue.

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Additionally, many scholars have found that a single stable country within a region, in this case the Sahel, can promote increased stability and security in neighboring countries, however, increased instability in neighboring countries can have the opposite effect. This is of particular importance regarding the Sahel as arms have to travel across a variety of borders to reach their destination. The death of longtime Chad President Idriss Déby Itno led to an increase in instability in the region, with several further coups occurring in the years since his death. This increase in instability demonstrates that the fates of the Sahel nations are highly intertwined.

The second overarching reason for the increase in arms smuggling within the Sahel is the prevalence of terrorist groups and the proximity to conflict zones. The two largest zones of conflict within the Sahel are Liptako-Gourma which lies at the intersection of Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali, and the Lake Chad Basin region, which lies in the borderlands of Chad, Niger, Nigeria, and Cameroon. The violence in the Liptako-Gourma region is associated with the collapse of the Libyan government in 2011. As the government fell, the number of weapons and trained military and paramilitary members in the region increased as various factions in Libya vied for power.

Additionally, the power vacuum in the region triggered the return of the Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali. The Tuareg people represent 10% of the population in Mali and organized themselves into the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and allied with various extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda. Although the MNLA and the Malian government signed a peace treaty in 2015, the government refused to negotiate with Islamist groups, which then took advantage of the vulnerable and transitory peace by expanding their control in northern and central Mali, as well as Niger and Burkina Faso. The Liptako-Gourma region has become a hotbed for extremist and terrorist attacks in recent years, increasing instability and causing further proliferation of weapons.

The Lake Chad basin region has become increasingly unstable due to the spillover effects from Boko Haram, a militant Islamic organization with its roots in northern Nigeria. In 2016, Boko Haram split, causing an increase in violence as various spinoff groups vied for control. As governance in the region continues to deteriorate, individuals continue to suffer and weapons continue to flow.

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The third and final overarching reason for the increase in illegal arms smuggling in the Sahel is corruption. Corruption is widespread amongst the Sahel nations, weakening the state's capabilities to defend against violence and smuggling. Additionally, when individuals see their government as corrupt and unable to adequately respond to the threats they face, they are more likely to welcome and celebrate militant groups. Amongst the militaries in many of the Sahel nations, there is nothing in their disciplinary code that recognizes the threat of corruption or mentions the negative effects it can have on state security. Additionally, many Sahel states lack protections for whistleblowers, lack reporting mechanisms altogether, and have rampant incidents of nepotism and favoritism in promotions. In day-to-day life, many individuals find that they cannot move up the social ladder or achieve a safe and stable life without engaging in some form of corruption. This feeling permeates from individuals up to civil society organizations and politicians, weakening both the physical ability of the Sahel states to counter insurgencies and arms trading as well as the mental resolve of individuals.

Much of the illegal arms smuggling occurs in regions distant from a country's seat of power, such as northern Mali, where the state has failed to protect individuals from violence, much less provide them with necessary social services such as healthcare and education. The prevailing feeling of corruption within the Sahel nations, as well as a lack of alternative economic opportunities, drives many to engage in smuggling and arms trafficking. How can DISEC address the many overlapping issues leading to arms smuggling in the Sahel?

BACKGROUND 2.0



Topic II: Protecting International Energy Infrastructure

In an increasingly electrified and industrialized world, energy availability and stability are more important than ever. However, energy grids, power plants, and delivery systems are facing unprecedented threat levels from governments, militant groups, and beyond. As DISEC, it is this committee's goal to promote international security and peace across the globe, and protecting energy infrastructure is key to this stability.

In the United States alone, there were more than 100 incidents of attacks on energy infrastructure such as power plants and substations. One attack was of particular importance, when two men attacked a power plant in Moore County, North Carolina in a targeted and well-planned fashion, plunging 25,000 homes into darkness during the cold winter months. Although the motive for this attack remains unknown, the weakness and vulnerability of a powerful nation's energy grid has inspired copycat attacks across the globe and increased anxiety among politicians and citizens about the security of the world's energy. Additionally, extremist groups both in the United States and around the globe have begun, across social media and online chat boards, to float the idea of attacking their target's energy infrastructure, causing mass panic and eventually the collapse of the state.

The vulnerability of energy infrastructure to direct physical attacks is a result of its design. There are approximately 60,000 power stations spread across the club and at least 200,000 voltage transfer stations, many of which are protected with only a fence and lie in sparsely populated or heavily industrialized regions where few people live. This makes these stations relatively easy targets for militant groups and other bad actors. Additionally, servicing energy to customers requires that the grid functions properly at every level. For example, for an individual to receive power in their home, their wires must be operational, their transformer box must be functional, they must have a proper connection to a transfer or substation, and that substation must connect to a power plant. An attack on any level of the grid can cause massive blackouts for tens of thousands, if not more, of people. Additionally, even small localized blackouts can have a "domino effect," where the blackout spreads far beyond the originally targeted region. Finally, there are a few backup options available to supply power to individuals in the case of a blackout. Backup generators are expensive and not available globally and power companies are unlikely to invest in large-scale backup systems as they are often cost-prohibitive.

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The security of nuclear power plants is of particular importance. The risks associated with inappropriate management or dysregulation of nuclear power plants are immense. A single meltdown can kill plant workers, as well as permanently damage the local ecosystem, and cause lifelong health conditions for the exposed. Protection of nuclear infrastructure has come under the international spotlight lately during the Russia-Ukraine war. Russia has made no secret of its desire to control the multiple nuclear power plants within Ukraine, both because of their symbolic power as a testament to Ukraine's ability to power its nation, as well as the strategic importance of controlling the availability of energy to the nation. In particular, Russia used immense resources to capture the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), the largest such plant in Europe. For months after its capture, there were repeated skirmishes in the area and frequent power losses to the plant, increasing the odds of a reactor meltdown. Additionally, there are widespread reports of Russia mistreating the plant's Ukrainian workers, a dangerous violation of international law. Although nuclear power plants are not the only energy infrastructure targeted during warfare, the symbolic importance and possible danger means they remain an essential part of any discussion surrounding protecting energy infrastructure targeted during warfare, the symbolic importance and possible danger means they remain an essential part of any discussion surrounding protecting energy infrastructure.

As technology continues to diffuse around the globe, the threat of cyber attacks, particularly on energy infrastructure, continues to grow. Almost all large-scale energy companies or organizations use the internet to connect their disparate power plants and transfer stations, which in conjunction with their importance to a nation's economy and stability, makes them a prime target for disruptive hacking. There are three main routes individuals may use to hack energy infrastructure.



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First is malware, which is a system designed to enter information technology accounts and disrupt typical functioning, steal data, or harm the IT network. A common form of malware is ransomware, where hackers steal and encrypt vital company data, and sell it back to the company for millions of dollars. The second route is through phishing, where a cyber attack is predicated on sending falsified communications (often made to look like communication from an individual's boss) to employees that allow hackers to then access that employee's login information. Levels of phishing attacks on energy companies have spiked in recent years. The third and final route is a distributed denial of service attack. (DDoS) A DDoS attack requires hackers to flood energy information systems with excess web traffic, preventing real users from accessing information regarding their energy, and potentially causing blackouts.

These three threats—physical attacks on energy stations, the threat of war, and an increase in cyber attacks can permanently alter the energy infrastructure landscape. And the problems do not end there—in fact, there are many more credible threats to energy security than are explained in this background guide. It is your responsibility as members of DISEC to address these issues, and more, to ensure that all people have access to secure and affordable energy.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What other issues exist regarding protecting energy infrastructure?

How can DISEC promote the security of energy infrastructure in conflict regions?

What specific parameters should be established regarding nuclear power plants?

Considering the international reach of cyber security threats, how can attacks be prevented?

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