

Houston Area Model United Nations Standard Committee

DISEC



Chair | Rohini Das

Topic A: Legitimacy of Nuclear Weapons
in National Defense

Houston Area Model United Nations 51
February 5 & 6, 2026

Chair Letter

Hello Delegates,

Hi guys! My name is Rohini and I am currently a junior pursuing a Finance degree at the University of Texas at Dallas!

I first joined Model United Nations during my sophomore year of high school and have been invested since! Model UN has become one of my biggest passions and I am proud to represent UTD MUN as a Writing Officer! Model UN is a great place to refine your skills, meet some great new people, and push yourself!

Having an opportunity to chair DISEC is incredibly exciting as this committee's relevance grows by the day. DISEC is a great environment to learn about the inner workings of the UN, how to handle delicate topics with care, and expand your knowledge. I am thrilled to see the unique approaches you all have been preparing!

I urge every delegate to be prepared to be challenged in committee. This committee's topics are the Legitimacy of Nuclear Weapons in National Defense and UAVs: Legality and Ethics of State Sponsored Assassinations and Human Rights Violations. These topics are serious, complex, and difficult to diplomatically address, but I am confident with sufficient preparation you all will do great! Be ready to think on your feet!

Good Luck!

Rohini Das

Chair of DISEC

rohinidas001@gmail.com





Committee Name
 Chair | Rohini Das
Houston Area Model United Nations 51
 February 5-6, 2026

Topic Overview

The debate over the legitimacy of nuclear weapons represents a foundational crisis in international relations. While the United Nations was founded on the principle of "saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war," the simultaneous emergence of atomic weaponry created a paradox: the most destructive force in human history became the primary tool for preventing large-scale conflict through deterrence.

Currently, the international community is divided due to legal and ethical reasons. The two "frameworks" separate a country's approach to national defense. The Deterrence Framework argues that nuclear weapons are legitimate instruments of national defense that prevent "Total War" between Great Powers by making the cost of aggression prohibitive.

The Humanitarian Framework, however, argues that the "catastrophic humanitarian consequences" of any nuclear detonation, including radiation, environmental collapse, and mass civilian death, would render these weapons inherently illegitimate and illegal under International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

The "legitimacy" of these weapons is not merely a philosophical question. Rather, it dictates national budgets, military doctrines, and the survival of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). As of 2026, the world faces a "Nuclear Renaissance," where disarmament has stalled, and a new arms race involving hypersonic delivery and Artificial Intelligence (AI) has begun.

The core of this topic involves reconciling the right to self-defense (Article 51 of the UN Charter) with the global imperative for disarmament along with ethical and moral dilemmas. Countries must navigate whether "security" is a zero-sum game played by powerful states or a shared global responsibility.

Houston Area Model United Nations

The Atomic Dawn and Cold War

The American's use of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 ended World War II but birthed a new era of "Brinkmanship." The Soviet Union's first successful test in 1949 ended that American monopoly.

Which led to the development of the Hydrogen Bomb, which utilized fusion to create yields hundreds of times larger than the Hiroshima device.

During this period, the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) was codified. The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis served as the ultimate historical warning, bringing the world to the edge of extinction and proving that "rational" actors could still stumble into nuclear catastrophe.

Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

The treaty focused on never building more Nuclear weapons, peaceful use, and finding a way to sustainably disassemble their existing weapons. Non-Proliferation meant that Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS) promise never to acquire nuclear arms.

While "peaceful use" mean that all states had an "inalienable right" to nuclear energy for civilian purposes.

Disarmament meant that the existing Nuclear Weapon States (NWS)—USA, USSR/Russia, UK, France, and China, promised to pursue disarmament in "good faith" (Article VI).

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty established a grand bargain and would have prevented the use of Nuclear energy as weapons.

Post Cold War

The 1990s saw massive reductions in stockpiles through the START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) process and the Cooperative Threat Reduction program, which secured loose nukes in former Soviet republics like Ukraine and Kazakhstan. However, the 21st century has seen the collapse of the INF Treaty (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces) and the Open Skies Treaty, signaling a return to unconstrained competition. The ICJ Advisory Opinion (1996): In a landmark ruling, the International Court of Justice stated that while the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to international law, the Court could not definitively conclude if it would be illegal in an "extreme circumstance of self-defense" where the very survival of a State was at stake.

Current Status

As of early 2026, the global inventory of nuclear warheads stands at approximately 12,100, with over 90% held by the United States and Russia. However, the era of numerical reductions has ended. For the first time since the Cold War, the total number of deployed warheads is increasing as states modernize their "Nuclear Triads" (Land-based missiles, Submarines, and Strategic Bombers)

A critical juncture for this committee is the expiration of the New START Treaty in February 2026. If no successor agreement is reached, it will be the first time in over 50 years that the world's two largest nuclear arsenals are not subject to legally binding limits or mutual inspections. The legitimacy of "defensive" nuclear postures is being challenged the possibility of hypersonic missiles and AI Command Control. With hypersonic missiles, they have the ability to travel at five times the speed of sound and maneuvering in flight.

These weapons render current missile defense systems obsolete, forcing states into a "launch-on-warning" posture. The integration of AI into nuclear early-warning systems reduces "decision time" for leaders, increasing the risk that a computer glitch or cyber-attack could trigger a nuclear retaliatory strike.



<https://www.nti.org/news/nuclear-threat-initiative-launches-make-nukes-history-campaign-to-spotlight-nuclear-weapon-risks-ahead-of-academy-awards/>

Case Examples

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

The DPRK is the only state to have withdrawn from the NPT and successfully tested nuclear weapons. From their perspective, nuclear possession is the only "legitimate" defense against external regime change. This case highlights the failure of UN sanctions to stop a determined proliferator. DPRK challenges the NPT framework and raises questions about how the international community handles "breakout" states that refuse to adhere to non-proliferation norms.

The Indo-Pakistani "Flashpoint"

India and Pakistan maintain a precarious nuclear balance. Pakistan's "Tactical Nuclear" doctrine involves using low-yield weapons on its own soil to stop an Indian conventional invasion. Critics argue this "lowers the threshold" for nuclear use, making a limited nuclear war a terrifyingly realistic possibility.

Unlike the Cold War's distant standoff, India and Pakistan share a land border and a history of conventional wars. Both maintain nuclear arsenals as a deterrent. This case highlights the "Stability-Instability Paradox" and the idea that nuclear deterrence at the strategic level may actually encourage lower-level conventional skirmishes.

NATO and Japan

Many non-nuclear states rely on the "extended deterrence" provided by the United States. Thirty nations, including Germany, Japan, and South Korea, do not own nuclear weapons but rely on the U.S. "Nuclear Umbrella." For these nations, the legitimacy of nuclear weapons is tied to their own security alliances, creating a complex middle ground between disarmament advocacy and defense requirements. These countries and the alliances complicate the debate as it brings up how these states often advocate for disarmament while simultaneously requiring nuclear threats for their own security.



Part UN Actions

Adopted January 24, 1946, UNGA Resolution 1(I) was the UN's first official act. It established the Atomic Energy Commission to eliminate nuclear weapons and ensure atomic energy was used only for "peaceful ends." The resolution provided the first definition of weapons of mass destruction and sought international safeguards and inspections. Despite unanimous support, it soon stalled due to Cold War friction: the US (Baruch Plan) prioritized inspections, while the USSR (Gromyko Plan) demanded immediate disarmament. Though the commission dissolved in 1952, the resolution remains the moral foundation for the IAEA and modern disarmament treaties.

UNSC Resolution 1540 addressed a critical gap in international law, the threat of non-state actors, such as terrorists, acquiring weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). While previous treaties focused on state-to-state proliferation, this resolution established legally binding obligations for all UN member states under

Chapter VII of the UN Charter

It requires nations to adopt domestic legislation criminalizing the trafficking of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. States must also implement rigorous border controls, export regulations, and physical security measures for "related materials." Overseen by the 1540 Committee, the resolution fosters global cooperation to prevent black-market networks from compromising international security.

Adopted in 2017 and entering into force in 2021, the TPNW, Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, is the first legally binding agreement to comprehensively prohibit nuclear weapons. It outlaws their development, testing, possession, and use, effectively closing a "legal gap" where nuclear arms—unlike chemical or biological weapons—lacked a global ban. Driven by the "Humanitarian Initiative," the treaty emphasizes the catastrophic impact of nuclear use. However, a "two-track" system has emerged: while 94 nations have signed, all nine nuclear-armed states and NATO members boycott it, favoring a "step-by-step" approach under the older NPT.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Does the NPT create a "nuclear apartheid" where five states are legally allowed to hold weapons while others are punished for seeking them? How can this perceived unfairness be resolved?
2. In an era of "Great Power Competition," how can the UN facilitate verification (like IAEA inspections) without infringing on national security secrets?
3. Is the TPNW a helpful "norm-setting" tool, or does it undermine the NPT by creating conflicting legal obligations?
4. Under the UN Charter Article 2(7), the UN cannot intervene in matters of domestic jurisdiction. However, the environmental effects of a nuclear "Nuclear Winter" are transboundary. At what point does a state's "national defense" choice infringe upon the sovereign right to life of neighboring neutral states?
5. In cases like the DPRK, have UN sanctions reached a point of "diminishing returns" where they hurt the population without slowing the nuclear program? Is it time for DISEC to shift from punishment-based non-proliferation to incentive-based security guarantees?



TOPIC A APPENDIX & SOURCES

1. Ajohnson. (2025, December 22). Is extending the new start limits in the US National Security Interest?. Atlantic Council. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/is-extending-the-new-start-limits-in-the-us-national-security-interest/#:~:text=Conclusion-,Introduction,expires%20on%20February%205%2C%202026>.
2. Army general and physicist helped usher in the atomic age. U.S. Department of War. (n.d.). <https://www.war.gov/News/Feature-Stories/Story/Article/3464967/army-general-and-physicist-helped-usher-in-the-atomic-age/#:~:text=The%20bomb%20was%20successfully%20used,Copy%20Link>
3. Global security continued to unravel in 2025. crucial tests are coming in 2026 | Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank. (n.d.-a). <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/12/global-security-continued-unravel-2025-crucial-tests-are-coming-2026>
4. How the TPNW works - ICAN. (n.d.-b). https://www.icanw.org/how_the_treaty_works
5. IAEA. (2014, July 11). NPT Review Conferences. International Atomic Energy Agency. <https://www.iaea.org/topics/npt-review-conferences#:~:text=After%20the%20entry%20into%20force,meet%20to%20review%20its%20implementation>.
6. IP26002: Global governance of the AI–nuclear nexus: Unpacking unga resolution 80/23. RSIS_NTU. (n.d.-a). <https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/idss/ip26002-global-governance-of-the-ai-nuclear-nexus-unpacking-unga-resolution-80-23/#:~:text=Resolution%2080%2F23's%20first%20operative,policies%20explicitly%20affirming%20this%20principle>.
7. IP26002: Global governance of the AI–nuclear nexus: Unpacking unga resolution 80/23. RSIS_NTU. (n.d.-b). [https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/idss/ip26002-global-governance-of-the-ai-nuclear-nexus-unpacking-unga-resolution-80-23/#:~:text=COMMENTARY-,On%201%20December%202025%2C%20the%20United%20Nations%20General%20Assembly%20\(UNGA, and%20communications%20\(NC3\)%20systems](https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/idss/ip26002-global-governance-of-the-ai-nuclear-nexus-unpacking-unga-resolution-80-23/#:~:text=COMMENTARY-,On%201%20December%202025%2C%20the%20United%20Nations%20General%20Assembly%20(UNGA, and%20communications%20(NC3)%20systems).
8. North Korea's nuclear weapons program. NCNK. (n.d.). <https://www.ncnk.org/resources/briefing-papers/all-briefing-papers/north-koreas-nuclear-weapons-program>
9. NPT. (n.d.-c). <https://www.nti.org/education-center/treaties-and-regimes/treaty-on-the-non-proliferation-of-nuclear-weapons/>
10. Nuclear abolition day from 2025 to 2026: Civil society cooperation to end nuclear threats and achieve global nuclear abolition. Abolition 2000. (n.d.). <https://www.abolition2000.org/en/nuclear-abolition-day-from-2025-to-2026-civil-society-cooperation-to-end-nuclear-threats-and-achieve-global-nuclear-abolition/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20International%20Court%20of%20Justice,suffering%2C%E2%80%9D%20Dr%20Vijh%20reminded%20the>
11. Nuclear disarmament – can the United Nations deliver?. UNFOLD ZERO. (n.d.). <https://www.unfoldzero.org/nuclear-disarmament-can-the-united-nations-deliver/#:~:text=The%20very%20first%20resolution%20of,atomic%20weapons%20from%20national%20arsenals>.
12. Shetty, S. (2026, January 7). 2026 signals critical moment to preserve nuclear order. The Korea Times. <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/opinion/20260107/2026-signals-critical-moment-to-preserve-nuclear-order#:~:text=Opinion,order%20is%20under%20extreme%20pressure>
13. The status of the TPNW. Nuclear Weapons Ban Monitor. (n.d.). [https://banmonitor.org/tpnw-status#:~:text=All%20nine%20nuclear%20armed%20states,\)%20also%20voted%20'no'](https://banmonitor.org/tpnw-status#:~:text=All%20nine%20nuclear%20armed%20states,)%20also%20voted%20'no')
14. United Nations General Assembly: Focus on Disarmament. Disarmament education. (n.d.). <https://education.unoda.org/presentations/ga.html>
15. United Nations. (n.d.). 9. Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. United Nations. https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XXVI-9&chapter=26#:~:text=22%20January%202021%2C%20No.
16. UNSC Resolution 1887 Part 2: Resolution's political significance and implications for the International Nonproliferation Regime. (n.d.-d). <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/unsc-resolution-1887-part-2/>

Copyright Notice

The contents of this document and any supplementary material are the sole intellectual property of Houston Area Model United Nations.

It may not be reproduced, republished, or used without the express written permission of Houston Area Model United Nations. Please email staff@houstonareamun.org with any questions.

