



**Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Model United Nations Conference  
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**William A. Rodríguez Jiménez**  
Secretary-General & Founder

**Arjun Mithal**  
Committee Director & Chair  
International Monetary Fund

**Madeline Zhang**  
Committee Director & Chair  
Special Political & Decolonization  
Committee

**Alexander Dimitrakakis**  
Committee Director & Chair  
European Union

**Amro Alshareef**  
Committee Director & Chair  
European Union

**Karunya Sethuraman**  
Committee Director & Chair  
Association of Southeast Asian  
Nations

**Justin Gong**  
Committee Director & Chair  
Disarmament & International  
Security Committee

Dear delegates,

**It is my distinct honor to welcome you to the very first edition of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Model United Nations Conference in China!**

MITMUNC China will be the first chapter of our conference outside of the United States and represents a new, exciting opportunity. Among many things, MITMUNC China represents the power of cooperation across nations in this ever more integrated world. We are delighted to be co-hosting this conference with ASDAN China, united by our common mission of developing tomorrow's leaders.

In late August, we will all convene in Shanghai for a weekend full of debate. As a delegate, you will be tasked with the challenge of representing your assigned delegation and presenting novel, feasible solutions to the world's most pressing issues. It will be your responsibility and privilege to engage in purposeful dialogue with your fellow delegates throughout the course of three days in which you will learn extensively. However, you will not be the only ones in this endeavor. This will be my first time in China which is also the case for the majority of the MITMUNC China committee directors. As such, we are very excited in getting to know you and experiencing Chinese culture firsthand.

A great deal of planning and work from many people has gone into this conference. Thus, I invite you to take full advantage of MITMUNC China. **Prepare yourself for your committee, think freely and creatively, and do not be afraid to speak up.** The beauty of Model United Nations lies in the peaceful coordination of unique thoughts and ideas coalescing to simulate the work of real world leaders, so your work as a delegate will certainly be important.

Use this background guide as your first step in preparation. Read it in its entirety and use it as a base to conduct individual research. Your committee director has prepared it for your benefit.

As MITMUNC China's founder, I very much look forward to giving you a warm welcome in late August! See you in Shanghai!

Sincerely,

William A. Rodríguez  
Secretary-General & Founder  
MITMUNC China

## **LETTER FROM THE CHAIR**

Honorable delegates,

Welcome to the Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) at the first ever Massachusetts Institute of Technology Model United Nations Conference in China!

I am pleased to have the opportunity to be the chair for this committee throughout this conference. I am currently a senior at MIT studying aerospace engineering with a passion for international politics and diplomacy. I am excited to be traveling to China for the first time for this conference!

Participating in Model UN has been one of the most rewarding and enriching experiences I have ever had. The opportunity to engage with your peers and discuss real challenges that our world is facing is a great one. The issues that we will be debating are relevant and unsolved: we have the opportunity to brainstorm solutions to these problems together.

The specific topics for our committee this conference will be the ongoing conflict in Syria and the proliferation of cyber weapons. Both of these topics are sensitive and challenging; both are relevant to international security and are subject to intense debate by scholars, analysts, politicians, and world leaders.

During the conference I sincerely look forward to hearing all of your thoughts, opinions, and ideas. This is an opportunity for you to engage in meaningful discussion on these topics, and I hope that each of you will speak your mind openly and freely. I hope that this committee can be both fun and thought-provoking, and I look forward to meeting all of you at MITMUNC China 2017!

Thank you,

**Justin Gong**  
Chair & Committee Director  
Disarmament and International Security Committee  
[mitmunc-disec@mit.edu](mailto:mitmunc-disec@mit.edu)  
MITMUNC China

## TOPIC 1: THE SYRIAN CONFLICT

### A. Introduction and Background

The Syrian Civil War has been raging now for over 6 years. It is arguably the **greatest humanitarian crisis of the 21<sup>st</sup> century**, and has been a topic of discussion by world leaders for years. Multiple nations and international organizations have attempted to mediate solutions to the conflict to no avail.



Figure 1: Map of the Middle East

Syria has a population of roughly 17 million people and a pre-crisis GDP of around \$40 billion USD (270 billion CNY). Syria's population is made up of primarily Arabs practicing Sunni Islam. Prior to the civil war, the largest city in Syria was **Aleppo** with a population of over 2 million people; however, today the largest city is Syria's capital, Damascus.

The Syrian conflict began in early 2011 during the **Arab Spring** in the Middle East, in which protestors in many countries called for regime change and reform from the government. Protesters in Syria

called for the resignation of the Syrian president, **Bashar al-Assad**, who has been in power since succeeding his father in 2000. The government proceeded to crack down on protests, which escalated in scale and violence.

By mid to late 2011, protests had begun escalating towards armed insurgency. The beginning of organized resistance was marked by the official formation of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) on July 29, 2011, whose goal was and remains to remove Assad from power. Efforts in early 2012 were undertaken by the **United Nations** to mediate a ceasefire between the warring parties; however these peace talks collapsed by mid 2012. 2012 also saw the beginning of the Battle for Aleppo, in which over 30,000 people have been killed.

From 2012 to 2014, rebel and government forces exchanged offensives and territory, centered around fierce fighting in the city of Aleppo. In 2013, a jihadist group known as the **Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant**, also known as ISIL or ISIS, made significant territorial gains throughout both Syria and Iraq, proclaiming a worldwide caliphate, or theocratic, fundamentalist Islamic government.

September 2014 saw the beginning of **American airstrikes** in Syria against ISIS targets. The **United States and its allies** soon formed a coalition that has been involved in military action in Syria to this present day. **Russian intervention** in support of Syrian government forces began one year later in September of 2015, and has also continued to this day.

Peace initiatives in early 2016 led to a partial ceasefire from February to July, that, however, unraveled during the summer as fighting escalated. A **Turkish** military offensive across the northern Syrian border occurred in August of 2016 against **Kurdish** and ISIS forces.

## B. Facts and Figures

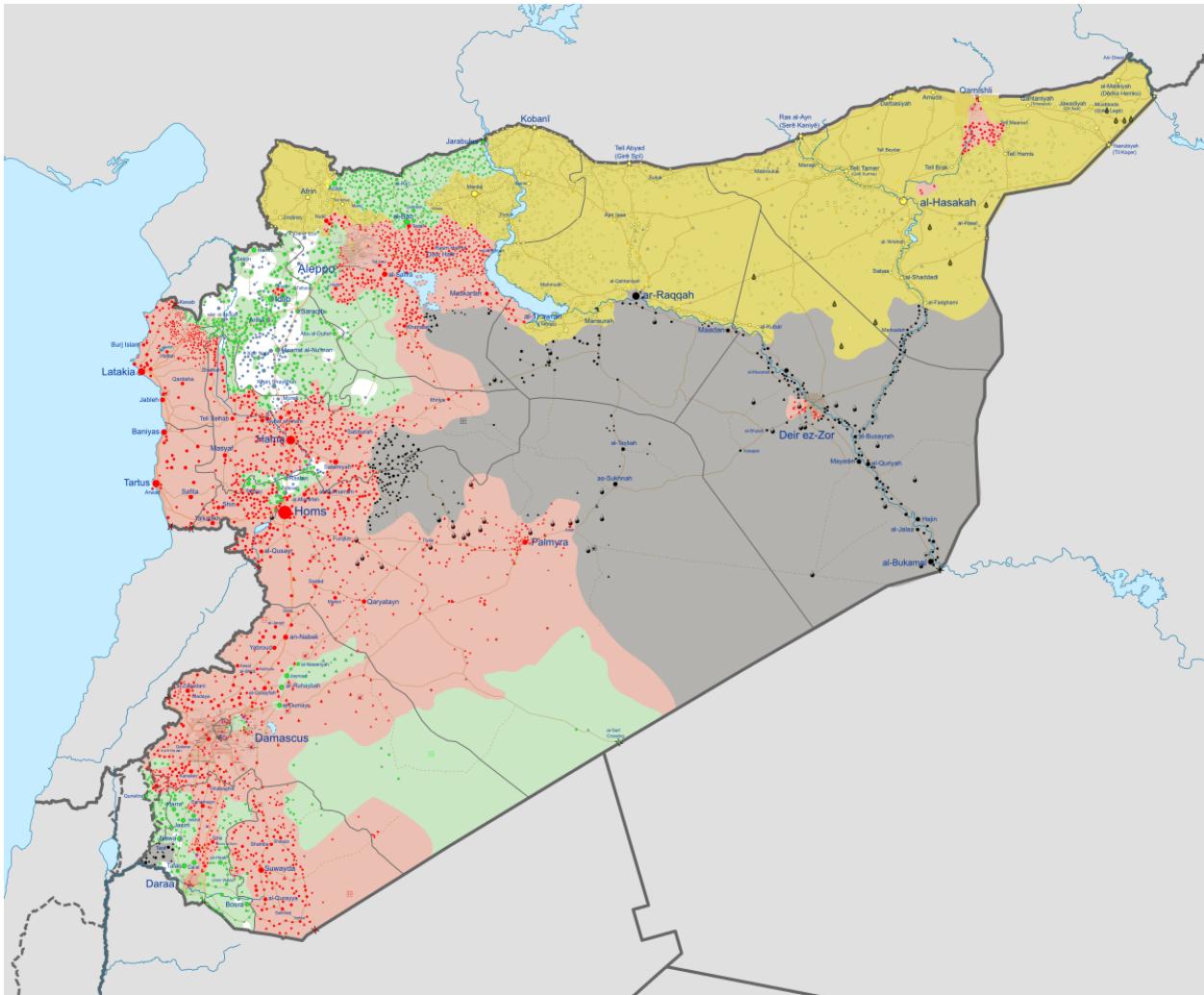


Figure 2: Map of Syria, June 2017. Red: Syrian government; Green: Syrian opposition; Yellow: Kurdish forces; Grey: ISIS; White: Tabrir al-Sham

The current military situation in Syria is both complicated and dynamic. Offensives by various military groups see the exchange of territory on a nearly daily basis. As of June, the Syrian government and ISIS both hold roughly the same amount of territory; however, the Syrian government controls roughly 78% of the population, versus the roughly 6% under ISIS governance. Kurdish and rebel forces control 14% and 9% of the population respectively. **You can find the latest division of territory among forces in Syria in this link: <http://isis.liveuamap.com>**

The United Nations estimates that around **400,000 people** have been killed as a result of the Syrian Civil War. This includes an estimated 95,000 civilians and 17,400 children.

The United Nations also estimates that over **6 million refugees** have been displaced as a result of conflict. A total of 13.5 million people have been identified by the UN as requiring humanitarian crisis, **making the Syrian Civil War the largest humanitarian crisis since World War II.** This includes 6 million internally displaced people within Syria and 4.8 million refugees outside of Syria. The refugee crisis has created other geopolitical problems as other nations have struggled to resettle these millions of refugees. Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees at around 3 million, followed by over 1 million registered in Lebanon.

### C. Subjects of concern for DISEC

One of the primary areas of concern for DISEC is the **control and elimination of illegal chemical weapons use** in Syria. The use of chemical weapons in Syria has been confirmed by various national and international bodies, including the United Nations. Multiple incidents of the deadly gas attacks were reported as early as late 2012, and confirmed in 2013.

Several inquiries into chemical weapons attacks by the United Nations have been conducted since 2013. These reports have confirmed the deliberate use of chemical weapons **against both military and civilian targets**, which is an international war crime under the **Geneva Convention**. The United Nations reports suggested, but did not confirm, that at least some of the attacks were perpetrated by the Syrian government, a charge which both the Syrian government and Russian government has contested overtly in publicly broadcasted sessions of the **United Nations Security Council**. One such session can be viewed here <https://youtu.be/VpUSlPVJfWI>. Attacks using chemical weapons have continued into 2017.

Another area of concern to DISEC is the rise of terrorist groups as a result of the chaotic situation in Syria. ISIS has directed, financed, claimed responsibility for, and inspired terrorist attacks throughout the world including high profile attacks in **France, United Kingdom, United States, Turkey, Germany, Tunisia, and Belgium**. Outside of Syria, ISIS militants have captured territory in Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Algeria, and the Philippines. In 2017, ISIS has pledged to continue and expand its terrorist activities throughout the world including direct threats against **China**.

A number of mass killings have also occurred within Syria since the beginning of the conflict committed by Syrian government forces, rebel groups, and ISIS. These have included airstrikes by the Syrian government that have targeted civilians, deliberate massacres and harrowing beheadings by ISIS, and executions by rebel forces. Additionally, airstrikes by both the American-led coalition and

Russian air forces have led to the deaths of hundreds, and probably thousands of civilians. Airstrikes by various parties have destroyed international aid stations, hospitals, and civilian infrastructure.

#### D. Conclusions and Questions

DISEC has a wide ranging role and has held talks on problems precipitated by the Syrian Civil War since 2011. Some questions that DISEC delegates at MITMUNC China may want to address are listed below.

- **How should the international community respond to the continuing refugee crisis?**
- **How should the international community respond to various war crimes including the use of chemical weapons and the killing of civilians?**
- **To what extent is it the responsibility of the United Nations to intervene in the Syrian Civil War?**
- **How should the United Nations respond to intervention by foreign military forces including but not limited to the United States and Russia?**
- **How should the international community respond to the rise of terrorism enabled by the conflict in Syria, particularly terrorism directed by ISIS?**

The list of questions above is intended to facilitate discussion and debate and is not exhaustive. Feel free to prepare responses to these questions in particular, related topics, or unrelated topics on the Syrian Civil War.

It is the role of DISEC to discuss disarmament, global challenges, and threats to peace throughout the world. The conflict in Syria presents one of the greatest challenges that falls of the scope of DISEC that the world has ever seen, and it is of utmost importance that the committee address this crisis thoroughly and thoughtfully.

The MIT Model United Nations Conference is currently attempting its own part to help people in Syria affected the war. **MITMUNC has partnered with the International Rescue Committee as its 2017 charity partner.** The IRC is known for its renowned response to refugee crises around the world. Apart from implementing localized relief efforts in areas of need, such as **providing healthcare to war victims** in Aleppo, Syria and assisting in the relocation of men, women, and children to safer areas, the IRC has introduced innovative solutions, such as providing direct cash transfers to people in dire financial need. Moreover, the IRC backs up and justifies its efforts with comprehensive research studies and trials, leveraging its resources to maximize impact. Finally, the

IRC holds great ties to M.I.T. since researchers from the university have collaborated on measuring the impact of certain programs. We are very proud in knowing that International Rescue Committee President and CEO David Miliband is also an alum of M.I.T. Consider donating \$2 USD to the IRC by [clicking here](#). 100% of the donations will assist the IRC in their efforts.



## E. References and further reading materials

- <https://www.cdc.gov/immigrantrefugeehealth/profiles/syrian/background/index.html>
- <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/03/01/the-islamic-state-pledged-to-attack-china-next-here-why/>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian\\_Civil\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_Civil_War)
- <http://syriancivilwarpmap.com>
- <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/syria-emergency.html>
- <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/syria/>

## TOPIC 2: PROLIFERATION OF CYBERWEAPONS



### A. Introduction and Background

With the rise of the age of information along with the increasing capabilities of computers, the colloquially termed issue of 'hacking' has also increased. Hacking and illegal intrusion into computer networks has existed since the first creation of computers and networks themselves.

A **cyberweapon** is defined as a defensive or offensive agent employed for some military, paramilitary, or intelligence objective.

The development of cyberweapons has fundamentally changed the balance and scope of international security. Cyberweapons have an array of intentions and uses. Many are employed to steal classified information, data, and intellectual property. Covert surveillance is often a major objective. In some cases, cyberweapons have been used to destroy software, data, and even hardware.

## B. Facts and Figures

Cyberweapons are an increasingly important topic in the global security sector. There are many examples of nations employing cyberweapons against other nations for a variety of reasons.

Nations with the largest known cyberweapons programs include the United States, Russia, China, Israel, North Korea, United Kingdom, and Iran. These countries collectively spend billions of dollars developing cyberweapons each year.

One of the most widely discussed incidents of cyberweapon use has been the **Stuxnet virus**. Almost certainly developed by the United States and Israel, the Stuxnet program specifically targets equipment and machines on factory assembly lines. The malware was used in Iran against nuclear weapon development plants, and was responsible for shutting down thousands of centrifuges used to refine nuclear material.

Surveillance cyberweapons have been the subject of many global information leaks over the last several years. One notable leak in particular in 2013 disclosed massive global surveillance by American intelligence groups and several of its European allies. These surveillance programs collected data from a large majority of the internet, and is considered one of the largest illegal spying and espionage operation in the world.

Some international security experts consider there to be an ongoing arms race for cyber warfare capabilities. As the world becomes more interconnected and reliant on technology, cyberweapons have become increasingly relevant in the global security realm. The ability to employ both defensive and offensive cyberweapons is seen as a critical national security requirement in many nations, particularly by global and regional powers.

Cyber attacks are often difficult to trace. In many cases, a country subject to cyber attacks has accused another country of perpetrating said attack, only for the accused country to deny its involvement. Blame is difficult to prove and rarely do nations admit to be the developers and users of cyber weapons. International laws regarding such breaches of data are vague and underdeveloped to an extent.

### C. Subjects of concern for DISEC

Hacking and internet security remains a global problem and point of contention on a number of different scales. DISEC will be primarily concerned with the development and proliferation of cyberweapons by state-sponsored organizations and by government agencies. In particular, large scale cyberweapons that target large organizations and other nations are of utmost concern.

Increased reliance on technology and the failure of cybersecurity to keep up with increased threats is a major problem.

Cyberweapons have the potential to directly harm both individuals and societies. Systems such as electrical power grids are susceptible to cyber attacks and could cause widespread disruption and distress. Global financial markets, though generally more well secured than other industries, could be attacked and cause financial chaos.

Cyberweapons also have the potential to indirectly decrease security by escalating tensions. Many nations that would be hesitant to directly and physically assault or confront another nation are more willing to instead use covert cyberwarfare tactics to infiltrate and disrupt. When these cyber intrusions are discovered or leaked, they lead to worsening relations and could escalate conflict into military action.

### D. Questions and Conclusion

International security is increasingly intertwined with cybersecurity. Therefore, it is the responsibility of DISEC to address how cyberweapons are being developed and used around the world. Some questions that delegates in DISEC may want to consider regarding this topic include but are not limited to:

- What is the responsibility of international organizations, such as the United Nations, to regulate the development and proliferation of cyberweapons?
- Should the international community develop protocols regarding cyberwarfare, as it has for conventional warfare?
- How should international organizations respond to cyber attacks?
- How can the international community prevent the escalation of cyber warfare, especially escalation of cyber warfare into military conflict?
- Are cyber attacks that target civilians to be considered war crimes?

The list of questions above is intended to facilitate discussion and debate and is not exhaustive. Feel free to prepare responses to these questions in particular, related topics, or unrelated topics on the proliferation of cyberweapons.

Cyberweapons are currently directly tied to international security, and are expected to become increasingly relevant to both peacetime and wartime security activities by nations throughout the world. DISEC has the responsibility to address this relevant topic and work towards solutions that contribute to world peace and security.

## E. References and further reading materials

- <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/05/who-are-the-cyberwar-superpowers/>
- <http://www.securityweek.com/global-cybersecurity-spending-reach-769-billion-2015-gartner>
- <http://www.strategicstudies.it/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Machiavelli-Editions-Cyber-Weapons-Legal-and-Strategic-Aspects-V2.0.pdf>
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyberwarfare>
- [http://papers.duckdns.org/files/2011\\_IECON\\_stuxnet.pdf](http://papers.duckdns.org/files/2011_IECON_stuxnet.pdf)
- [http://dspace.uni.lodz.pl:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11089/12511/11-161\\_174-Kozlowski.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](http://dspace.uni.lodz.pl:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11089/12511/11-161_174-Kozlowski.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

## F. Notes

This document is intended as an overview and introduction to each topic. Delegates are encouraged to consult resources outside of this document for more specific and in depth information.

This document was prepared in June of 2017. As both topics contained within relate to ongoing issues, the information inside is subject to change.

Author and Contact:

Justin Gong, jlwgong@mit.edu