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Guide

WAMUNC XXVI

DISEC

Letter from the Chair

Esteemed Delegates,

My name is Owen Lewis and it is a pleasure to be your chair for this session of WAMUNC! I anticipate that your diversity of thought and eagerness to learn will help elucidate one of the world's most complex geopolitical issues.

Allow me to introduce myself: I am a first-year student at George Washington University majoring in International Affairs and am a member of the University Honors Program. So far, the opportunity to critically investigate diplomatic affairs across the street from the State Department and a few blocks from the White House is truly exhilarating. I plan to declare a concentration in both Conflict Resolution and Middle East Studies in addition to minoring in Arabic. I hope to find myself perhaps working for a think tank before entering the Political sector of the U.S. Foreign Service. Personally, I love IA because I feel like diplomacy is one of the most tangible ways of providing a more peaceful and equitable world for others. If anyone has questions about being a student in Washington D.C., please don't hesitate to ask. Aside from academics, I enjoy playing volleyball, photography, guitar, exploring restaurants with my roommates, and spending time with my twin sister who is a Freshman at Johns Hopkins.

It is far from an exaggeration to say that Model UN has changed my life. I founded my Model UN team at my high school and have witnessed a dramatic transformation in my peers that I attribute to MUN and its stress on cooperation and public speaking. Even though you may be joining the committee to receive an award, I encourage you to empathize with your peers, listen to understand, and work to strengthen your global perspective. Lastly, please understand that this topic may contain discussions of casualties and war. If you need to exit the committee room at any time please feel free to do so. Please understand that for some delegates, this topic may not be exclusively ideological. Looking forward to an amazing conference!

Raise High — Owen Lewis

Introduction to Committee

The United Nations Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) was created in 1945 as part of the main UN Charter. DISEC was the first main committee to be signed into existence as part of the General Assembly (GA), so it is often referred to as 'The First Committee." According to the UN Charter, DISEC "deals with disarmament, global challenges and threats to peace that affect the international community and seeks out solutions to the challenges in the international security regime." The First Committee helps member countries to negotiate disarmament treaties, and encourages nations to de-escalate weapons crises—specifically when nuclear weapons are involved. In addition to being a GA committee, DISEC is an institution of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), which was created in 1982 as the Department for Disarmament Affairs in response to the GA's second special session on disarmament. Its name and department have changed several times, but in 2007, UNODA formally became a UN Office. UNODA assists DISEC in its work within the GA. Along with its status as a UNODA institution, DISEC also works closely with the Security Council (SC) to establish "general principles of cooperation in the maintenance of international peace and security, including the principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments". DISEC is primarily concerned with striving for peace and threat reduction through de-escalation; goals established by its status within the GA, partnership with the SC, and relationship with UNODA.

Historical Background

Prominent Causes of the Syrian Civil War

The Syrian Civil War is an ongoing armed conflict within the Syrian state that broke out in 2011. The conflict has been a consistent destabilizing force in the region, leading to the involvement of many regional and foreign powers, as well as terrorist and rebel groups. The war was a result of violent government retaliation against Arab Spring protests which occurred across the country in 2011. Police, military, and paramilitary forces brutally suppressed civilian protests, leading to the formation of opposition militias of varying size, strength, and goals. Major players in the war include pro-government forces like the Syrian military and Iran, and opposition forces like the Free Syrian Army, the Islamic State, national jihadist groups, and Kurdish forces. As of today, the Syrian Civil War has resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths, as well as millions of refugees and internally displaced peoples.

Sunni-Shia Split

Although no country's foreign policy is monolithic, understanding the ideological split between Sunni and Shia Islam provides clarity about political dissent and how alliances among non-state actors devolved into proxy warfare. According to an estimate by the Council on Foreign Relations, 85 percent of Islamic followers are Sunni whereas 15 percent are Shia. The Sunni-Shia split, in its most simplistic form, encapsulates a chasm regarding the intended predecessor of the Prophet Muhammad. Sunni Muslims believed the next leader of the Muslim faith should be decided via sura or consensus–one that aligned themselves with Abu Bakr. Alternatively, Shia Muslims were steadfast in their approval of Ali, Muhammad's cousin, to

replace him. As our lives have become multifaceted, the modern interpretation and practical application of religious textures have generated additional disagreements among the two groups in the 20th century. Countries with the largest population of Sunni Muslims include but are not limited to Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Turkey, and Nigeria, and the political class of Iran. The countries with the largest population of Shia Muslims include the majority of the Iranian public, Iraq, Bahrain, Azerbaijan, Yemen, and Lebanon. The most accurate comparison of Syria's ideological composition would be the opposite of Iran. The Syrian public consists largely of a Sunni majority. Hafez and Bashar Al Assad, who has been president for a cumulative period of 52 years, represent an Alawite minority. Alawites are an extension of Shia Islam characterized by a confidential religious hierarchy and a tritheistic belief in Mohammad, Ali, and Salman al Farisi–a Persian companion of Mohammad. As the al-Assad regime (Baath party) prioritized Alawite officials for influential governmental positions, consolidated and normalized diplomatic relations with Iran, and refused to denote the sectarian realities of Syria, generated political dissent that reached a boiling point during the Arab Spring.

The Assad Regime/Baath Party

Hafez Al Assad set the stage for proxy warfare by fervently establishing geopolitical alliances. After Hafez took power in 1971, he converted Syria into a regional power–helping militarize both Lebanon and Israeli-occupied Palestine, and developing a strategic understanding with revolutionary Iran in opposition to US dominance and Western hegemony. For instance, following Syrian sponsorship of an Egyptian surprise attack on Israel, geopolitical divisions generated by this engagement caused Iranian officials, with whom Israel has an adversarial relationship, to defend the Ba'ath party simply based upon shared political interests, very little of which pertain to the conflict itself. Essentially, Hafez Al-Assad supported Syrian engagement, building distinct allies who reciprocated support to the Ba'ath party in the Syrian Civil War (Hezbollah, etc) and subsequently antagonizing nation-states that sequentially minimized Bashar's efforts decades later.

The economic instability and inequality perpetuated by Bashar al-Assad was also a contributing factor in the Syrian Civil War. Before Hafez al-Assad's death, Bashar al-Assad was presumably second in line for his presidency behind his brother, Basil al-Assad. When Basil al-Assad passed away in a car accident, Bashar ascended to the presidency and would amplify the secular Arab nationalism of his father's administration for decades to come. Like many dictatorial regimes, the consolidation of power caused Bashar al-Assad to devolve from a liberal agenda in which he advocated for establishing a society that "transcends class divisions in a socialist society." Although there is considerable variation in the implementation of socialist policies (land redistribution and social welfare programs), it is safe to say that in recent years the Assad regime has not been emblematic of socialism or permeable classes. As Syria was experiencing a massive drought, he rejected sustainable agricultural practices that increased poverty rates among the lower class. Assad additionally announced that he would not support politics that might threaten the dominance of the Baath party, lengthened constitutional term limits, and presumably tortured several non-state journalists in a detention center colloquially known as "Branch 25.1." As the doctrines of freedom, liberty, autonomy, and the implementation of democratic institutions became very popular when juxtaposed with Syria's heavy censorship, economic control, and

police brutality, the negligence of the Syrian populace is ultimately what brought the Arab Spring to Syria.

Arab Spring

The failure of the Arab Spring to dismantle Bashar al-Assad's authoritarian regime was an additional factor in the creation of the Syrian Civil War or the Syrian Proxy War. Originating in Tunisia, the Arab Spring was a series of democratic demonstrations throughout the SWANA region (South West Asia and Northern Africa) that prompted the ousting or forced resignation of several authoritarian parties including in Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen. The correlation between the forced removal of a sitting president and the creation of democratic institutions is not constant, however. Countries like Libya and Yemen experienced factionalism and further domestic oppression after the removal of Muhammad Gaddafi and Ali Abdullah Saleh respectively. Despite Egypt and Tunisia, where presidents Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak resigned or fled after becoming overwhelmed by their inability to appease 'anarchist' democratic protests, lucidly stated, that there was no stopping Bashar al-Assad. As groups took up arms against security forces, Bashar al-Assad responded vigorously: In cities such as Homs and Bāniyās, Bashar-Al Assad's troops encircled neighborhoods with tanks, and artillery, cutting off communication and utilities" Inciting sectarian divisions, Bashar al-Assad additionally exacerbated the divide between the Alawite minority (the Ba'ath party) and the Sunni majority by creating conspiratorial propaganda to convince the majority that protestors were terrorists. The urgency of a substantial defense unit provoked the formation of the Free Syrian Army, a variety of localized battalion troops that solidified a militarized conflict between the rebels, the Ba'ath Party, and other non-state actors.

Topic 1: Syrian Civil War

Discussion about the Syrian Civil War can be largely broken up into four subtopics. Chemical Warfare, Proxy Warfare, and Syrian Reintegration.

Chemical Warfare

Forensic evidence from Syria has proved that in the Eastern region of Ghouta in 2013, rebel forces were exposed to sarin gas–a violation of international law. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) also attested to the use of gas bombs on a separate occasion, this time in rebel-controlled Aleppo. In 2014, reports emerged regarding a chlorine bomb in Kafr Zita, a city in Northern Syria. Following accusations from the international community, opposition groups claimed that Assad's forces moved military equipment into civilian territories to diminish the threat of a counterattack by the United States. After two sessions of the security council meetings, the Russian Federation requested that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) initiate the accounting, inspection, control, and elimination of Syria's chemical weapons. Unfortunately, the jurisdiction of the UN Security Council was not commanding enough for Bashar al-Assad. Assad frequently violated Chapter VII Article 52 of the United Nations Charter, which requires him to submit a request to counteract a threat militarily. Given his deviance, it may not be unforeseen that varying types of chemical weapons were utilized in northern Syria in 2015, in the Hama Governorate in 2016, in the Idlib province

in 2017, and in Damascus in 2018. Since 2018, entities like OPCW and the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons have conducted thorough investigations certifying the validity of these atrocities.

Proxy Warfare

The intricate web of alliances and arms trading has exacerbated the longevity of the Syrian Civil War because each country's support for Assad, Rebel Forces, or an intermediary force is incentivized by national interests. These interests include reinforcing regional power dynamics (Sunni-Shia), combatting terrorism, bolstering strategic interests (ie. Turkiye being Anti- Kurds), or publicly displaying political allyship perhaps in return for future support. The most prominent state and non-state actors consist of The Free Syrian Army, Al-Qaida, ISIS, Kurdish Forces, Iran, Hezbollah, Persian Gulf States (Jordan, Kuwait, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, etc), Turkiye, Russia, and the United States.

The Free Syrian Army, accumulating weaponry from foreign backers and defections from Assad's military, gradually mobilized a substantial and considerably resilient militia. In 2014, a combination of Rebel forces and Jihadist groups affiliated with the insurrectionist movement occupied a cohesive territory in eastern Syria in addition to having fragmented jurisdiction alongside the eastern and southern borders. Today–although there is some ambiguity as to the exact square mileage–the opposition group Interim Syrian Government/Turkish opposition groups (SNA) and the Free Syrian Army only control a small fraction of the previous territory. The current territory is exclusive to Syria's northern and southern borders. An additional force in the Civil War was the Jabhat al-Nusra Front, an offshoot of Al Qaeda that supported Rebel forces while attempting to establish a Caliphate in the region. In hopes of bereaving opposition forces of international support, Bashar al-Assad would often categorize Rebels and Jabhat al-Nusra as a singular entity whose existence is contingent on malicious militant extremism. In 2013, ISIS (The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) diverged away from Al-Qaeda over internal disagreements. ISIS' proclaimed caliphate at its acme spanned tens of thousands of miles and sought to target not the Assad's regime, but predominantly the Kurds and Iraq. The Kurds are a stateless nation of the Indo-European Kurdish ethnic group that contains unique linguistic and cultural traditions. Located in parts of Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria, Kurds relinquished authority over the region to Syrian jurisdiction until the Arab Spring. Although there is much contentious debate about whether Kurdistan ought to be recognized as an autonomous zone, Kurdish took the opportunity to succeed from Syria and has experienced assorted levels of suppression from neighboring states.

As previously stated, non-state actors are motivated by varying factors. The Gulf States and Turkiye spent 95 to 128 billion dollars in weaponry and the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) trained to support Rebel forces. Intervention can be observed from the Russian Federation as well, bombing rebel forces and contradicting President Putin's agenda of solely diminishing ISIS authority). Iran has invested 15 to 16 billion dollars worth of outdated arms transfers and asymmetrical military forces to the Assad Regime. Iran has additionally induced significant political dissent in the Gulf States using their state-controlled media, Press TV, projecting monolithic narratives that support the opposition parties of Sunni monarchies. Although Turkiye was a historic "middleman" in supplying arms to Rebel forces, Erdogan began

to prioritize denying Kurdish troops sovereignty and the right of self-actualization. Once again, the driving forces of the international community's engagement are enigmatic, varying, and fluid. It is important to acknowledge, however, that this formulaic way of preserving geopolitical alliances and counteracting terrorism via arms trading has detrimental effects.

Syrian Reintegration

Where are we today? Although several rounds of multilateral peace talks have transpired, according to SOHR, the number of casualties has reached several hundreds of thousands. Syrian elections occurred in May of 2022, securing Bashar al-Assad's fourth term as president and enabling his regime to further consolidate authority previously ceded to the opposition forces. Currently, the Syrian Arab Republic controls at least two-thirds of Syrian territory and is demonstrating intentions to reintegrate Syria (its deteriorating infrastructure, fraudulent political practices, and impoverished citizens in all) into global economic markets and diplomatic affairs. In May 2023, Syria was reinstated as a member of the Arab League, a regional organization consisting of 23 nations in the SWANA region dedicated to "enhancing cooperation in economic, cultural, social, health and other fields." This reintegration can largely be attributed to Saudi Arabia who encouraged states like Qatar and Kuwait to certify the accreditation of Syrian entry, preventing an alternative resolution in which Iran bolstered their influence in Syria. Not only does Syria's reintegration convey that the Baath party is here to stay for the foreseeable future, including Syria in the strategic discourse surrounding humanitarian aid, national security, and widespread protection from jihadist military juntas, may be the quickest path towards peace. Others, including Aron Lund, an analyst at Al Jazeera, believe that Syrian reintegration is arbitrary and fails to reconcile the onerous ripple effect of Assad's centralized political platform and ruthless military force. He writes, "The Arab League can't deliver any of that, but there are Gulf Arab states that can." Perhaps to truly revitalize Syrian society, investment and cooperation will have to transcend religious and political alliances of the past.

Paradigms of Negotiation/Possible Solutions

What is peace? Is it solely the absence of conflict? Is it dedication to mutual sacrifice? Is it a commitment to multi-narrative discourse and negotiation? How can we acquire and maintain peace? Is peace acquired through the enhancement of security forces (analogous to the United States), social norms (Japan), or the strict enforcement of rules (China)? Foreign policy on the matter differs drastically across the globe but can be categorized into the following frameworks: Power Politics, Order Politics, Negotiation Politics, and Arbitration. Each of these has historic drawbacks and effective implementations that ought to be explored when discussing the Syrian Civil War.

Power Politics

Power politics is the notion that peace is acquired through strength, or rather when a conglomerate of nation-states can both defend themselves and pose a militaristic threat. Generally speaking, nation-states with robust militaries and intelligence agencies often eliminate the threat of external invasion or manipulation. Nonetheless, to say "Peaceful nations have strong militaries" and therefore "Peace is contingent on Strong militaries" is a hasty generalization. A

historic event that possibly contradicts Power politics is the Cold War. The Soviet Union and The United States, alongside their respective allies, were equipped with nuclear weapons, submarines, technologically advanced aerial vehicles, etc. Many of these advancements could deprive governments of energy and food let alone create mass casualties. The Cold War concluded following the Cuban Missile Crisis, in which members of the Kennedy Administration established covert diplomatic cables and discourse with Nikita Krushev.

Order Politics

The notion that laws and regulations can make a society more peaceful is a commonly adopted political strategy. An example of order politics could perhaps be the prevention of domestic turmoil or political coups via constitutional amendments. In a proxy war, however, order politics might not be a comprehensive solution. Given that political prison camps incentivize conformity to communist practices and minimize violent protests, North Korean society may be seen as a peaceful state. However, another school of thought makes a discrepancy in that laws and regulations create order but lack the doctrines of equality and equity. For instance, the unyielding consequences in Hamurrabi's code minimized violent crime. The code did not, however, establish a society in which the treatment of others is cohesive and dispenses social status. The efficacy of order politics in Syria is likely contingent on the morality of the laws themselves.

Negotiation Politics

Negotiation Politics is an umbrella term for mutual political compromise. One example of Negotiation politics is the United States' Compromise of 1850, which included both abolitionist doctrines (The abolition of slavery in D.C. and the admission of California as a free state) as well as confederate clauses (The Fugitive Slave Act). When two parties objectively and diametrically oppose one another, this partial pacification oftentimes accumulates into a larger disagreement or conflict–exemplified by the American Civil War. Nonetheless, in a geopolitical system in which power is a commodity, incentivizing countries to make tradeoffs for mutualistic benefit is an arduous but rewarding feat. In Syria, it is important to also distinguish between public and political negotiation. Some believe compromise made by political officials must be crafted in the best interest of the constituents to cultivate peace. Negotiation politics may also include tertiary jurisdiction, in which a third party like the United Nations assumes control over a particular region or entity in hopes of cultivating a vigorous resolution.

Topic 2: Migration and Refugee Crisis

The Syrian Civil War has generated the most expensive humanitarian crisis and migration network in history. In 2023, 6 million Syrian Refugees have sought refuge across the globe. Turkey and Lebanon accept the most refugees, however, large populations are present in the SWANA region, the Mediterranean states, Europe, and even Malaysia.

According to the United Declaration of Human Rights, the right to leave one's country is protected under Article 13: "Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence

within the borders of each state. Under the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, states are prohibited from returning refugees to their previous countries, or conducting arbitrary detention, and are required to act in accordance with Article 14 which recognizes the right to seek asylum. Due to the economic implications of overcrowding in urban areas, several countries have deliberately bypassed protocols. For example, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council, "In 2022, the Czech Republic introduced border controls to prevent Syrian refugees from entering from Slovakia. Together with Hungary and Poland, the Czech Republic has refused to participate in the EU's scheme for the relocation of refugees from Greece and Italy. Under the Trump Administration, the United States." Additionally, Germany has dictated that Syrian refugees will be required to return to Syria after the war–although the concrete details of a mass exodus of Syrian refugees have not been articulated.

As previously stated, there are socioeconomic implications of open immigration policy that can be detrimental to domestic housing and employment markets. Although GDP, the cumulative sum of expenditure and production, increases with an influx of occupants, the private sector must increase to meet a nascent demand for housing and basic goods. International Center for Migration Policy Development, Syrian Migrants, given their vulnerability and desperation in obtaining a financial foothold, are subjected to extreme labor and sexual exploitation. Restricting access to migration may be a short-term yet proactive methodology for minimizing labor and sexual exploitation. Lastly, the Syrian Civil War has produced humanitarian crises that impede the UN's sustainable development goals–particularly No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and well-being, Quality Education, Clean Water and Sanitation, and Peace Justice, and Strong Institutions. In recent years, the UN has adopted the "Cluster" mechanism for global emergencies. "Under this approach, different sectors or "clusters" are assigned to lead and coordinate specific areas of humanitarian response, such as health, education, shelter, and food security." These sectors include the World Health Organization, UNICEF, World Food Programme, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and United Nations Development Programme. The efficacy of the UN Cluster plan in alleviating hardship for Syrian refugees lacks sufficient definitive evidence but should not be neglected.

Key Questions

1. How can we systematically improve international judicial systems to hold those who acquire and use chemical weapons accountable?
2. What are the implications of Syrian Reintegration? What are the implications of a Kurdish State?
3. How can geopolitical relationships be a helping or hindering force in regional stability?
4. What is the most effective paradigm of conflict resolution for the Syrian Civil War?
5. Where should migrants go? What support systems should be implemented?
6. What is the most comprehensive humanitarian aid that accounts for the health, educational, and professional needs of migrants? Are there flaws in the UN Cluster Plan?

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