SIMUN VII

DISEC STUDY GUIDE

The Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) stands as the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, wielding a critical mandate to address the comprehensive array of challenges intrinsic to international security and disarmament. Functioning as one of the six main committees of the GA, DISEC operates in close synergy with the UN Security Council (UNSC) but maintains a distinct and vital role within the UN ecosystem.

While the UNSC possesses the authority to enact binding decisions under Chapter VII of the Charter, DISEC serves as the primary deliberative platform for all 193 UN Member States. Its purpose is to foster inclusive dialogue, build consensus among diverse nations, and meticulously shape emerging international norms and legal frameworks. This is achieved through the drafting of resolutions and recommendations, which, while advisory to the plenary session of the General Assembly, carry significant political weight and moral authority.

The committee's work is fundamentally aligned with the UN's paramount objective, as enshrined in its Charter's preamble: "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war." Consequently, delegates serving in DISEC are entrusted with the formidable responsibility of crafting detailed, nuanced, and actionable resolutions that confront some of the globe's most persistent and emerging security threats, from conventional arms control to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

At SIMUN VII, DISEC presents delegates with two agendas they can choose to debate over:
Agenda A: *The Question of Nuclear Non-Proliferation: Implications of the U.S. Withdrawal from the JCPOA*
Agenda B: *The Question of Preventing the Proliferation and Misuse of Biological Weapons in the 21st Century*

Agenda A: The Question of Nuclear Non-Proliferation: Implications of the U.S. Withdrawal from the JCPOA

Introduction to the Topic

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), widely referred to as the Iran nuclear deal, stands as a landmark achievement of multilateral diplomacy upon its finalization in 2015. Conceived with the primary objective of verifiably guaranteeing the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program, the agreement offered comprehensive sanctions relief in return for stringent, long-term limitations and unprecedented international monitoring. Its core provisions established verifiable caps on Iran's uranium enrichment levels and stockpiles, drastically reduced its number of operational centrifuges, and neutered the proliferation potential of its Arak heavy-water reactor, all under the gaze of the most robust and intrusive inspection regime ever negotiated by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). This delicate balance was profoundly disrupted by the unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the agreement in 2018, an action that triggered the re-imposition and intensification of devastating U.S. sanctions. In a calculated response, Iran initiated a series of incremental yet significant breaches of the JCPOA's key limitations, pushing the entire agreement to the precipice of total collapse. This agenda item compels delegates to conduct a rigorous examination of the profound and multifaceted implications of this crisis, which extend to the very integrity of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime, the fragile equilibrium of regional stability in the Middle East, and the future viability of diplomatic conflict resolution as a tool of statecraft.

Historical Context:

The signing of the JCPOA in 2015 between Iran, the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—plus Germany), and the European Union, represented the culmination of a nearly two-decade-long diplomatic struggle. This period was characterized by escalating international concern, driven by revelations of undeclared nuclear facilities, extensive investigations by the IAEA, and the successive imposition of multiple, increasingly stringent UN Security Council sanctions resolutions. These measures, coupled with crippling unilateral sanctions from the United States and European Union, placed immense economic pressure on Iran, creating the conditions for serious negotiation. The final agreement was subsequently endorsed and given legal force under international law by UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which simultaneously terminated the previous sanctions regime. However, the political consensus underpinning the deal proved fragile. In 2018, the U.S. administration under President Donald Trump executed a fundamental policy shift, unilaterally withdrawing from the JCPOA and publicly condemning it as "defective to its core." This was immediately followed by the swift re-imposition and dramatic intensification of U.S. sanctions on Iran under a "maximum pressure" campaign, a move that fundamentally shattered the agreement's core bargain and irrevocably altered the strategic calculus for all remaining parties, directly setting the stage for the ongoing and dangerous crisis.

Current Situation

The JCPOA currently languishes in a state of severe dysfunction and operational paralysis. In direct response to the U.S. withdrawal and the demonstrated inability of the other signatory parties to circumvent U.S. secondary sanctions and deliver meaningful economic relief, Iran has embarked on a systematic and publicly declared campaign of rolling back its commitments. This has involved the deliberate and verified breach of several critical JCPOA limits.

Iran's nuclear program has now advanced to activities strictly prohibited by the original deal, most alarmingly including the enrichment of uranium to 60% purity, a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels, the accumulation of a rapidly growing stockpile of enriched uranium far exceeding permitted quantities, and the deployment and operation of advanced centrifuge cascades.

Efforts to salvage the agreement, such as the indirect negotiations between the U.S. and Iran mediated by the E3 in Vienna, have been stalled since 2022. This diplomatic impasse is sustained by a complex web of complicating factors, including destabilizing regional geopolitics, entrenched domestic political opposition in both Washington and Tehran, and a fundamental lack of agreement on core issues such as the scope and sequence of sanctions relief and the nature of guarantees against future U.S. withdrawals.

Throughout this period, the IAEA has continued to provide regular reporting on these violations, while simultaneously facing growing challenges from Iran in exercising its monitoring and verification mandate, collectively creating a volatile and increasingly dangerous stalemate with no clear path toward de-escalation.

Impacts

The de facto collapse of the JCPOA has precipitated severe, multi-layered, and far-reaching consequences that extend well beyond the immediate parties to the agreement:

Regional Instability
The prospect of a nuclear-threshold Iran has dramatically heightened tensions and security anxieties across the Middle East, fueling an intense regional security dilemma. This environment has exacerbated proxy conflicts and brought long-standing adversaries, particularly Israel and Iran, closer to the brink of direct military confrontation, with Israel repeatedly stating it will not allow Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon and being implicated in acts of sabotage against Iranian nuclear facilities.

Risk of Nuclear Arms Race
The erosion and potential failure of the JCPOA directly undermine the credibility and authority of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). It risks discrediting the NPT's central bargain, whereby non-nuclear-weapon states forgo the pursuit of nuclear arms in exchange for access to peaceful nuclear technology and a commitment from nuclear-weapon states to pursue disarmament. This perceived failure could incentivize proliferation in other regions and has already prompted regional rivals, notably Saudi Arabia, to openly declare their intention to pursue their own civilian nuclear capabilities, which could rapidly become militarized.

Humanitarian and Economic Consequences
The reinstated and intensified U.S. sanctions regime has had a devastating impact on Iran's domestic economy, triggering hyperinflation, a currency collapse, and severe shortages of essential goods, including life-saving medicines. This has precipitated a dire humanitarian crisis for the Iranian populace, exacerbating poverty and limiting access to critical healthcare, with the sanctions' broader effects crippling the nation's economic potential and global trade.

Challenge to Multilateral Diplomacy
As a signature achievement of 21st-century multilateralism, the potential failure of the JCPOA raises fundamental and disquieting questions about the viability of complex, multi-party diplomatic negotiations as a mechanism for resolving the world's most intractable security problems. Its collapse risks entrenching cynicism and empowering unilateral approaches to international relations, thereby weakening the global governance system as a whole.

Key Stakeholders / Actors

Iran
Seeks verifiable, lasting, and comprehensive relief from sanctions to revive its crippled economy, while simultaneously demanding credible guarantees for the political survival of any agreement against future unilateral withdrawals by other parties.

United States
The current administration officially supports a mutual return to compliance but operates under significant domestic political constraints; it ultimately seeks a "longer and stronger" agreement that also addresses issues beyond the nuclear file, such as Iran's ballistic missile program and regional activities.

E3 (France, Germany, UK) & EU
Remain strong proponents of preserving the JCPOA as a critical non-proliferation instrument; they act as primary mediators between Washington and Tehran but possess limited economic and political leverage to counteract U.S. secondary sanctions or compel Iranian compliance.

Russia & China
As remaining parties to the JCPOA, both nations have consistently criticized the U.S. withdrawal, and they continue to publicly support diplomatic efforts and sanctions relief for Iran, partly as a means to challenge U.S. global influence and maintain their own strategic and economic ties with Tehran.

Israel
Considers a nuclear-capable Iran an existential threat; it was a vehement opponent of the original JCPOA and is a staunch supporter of the "maximum pressure" campaign, having reportedly conducted covert actions to sabotage Iran's nuclear program.

Saudi Arabia & Gulf States
View Iran as their primary regional rival and source of instability; they shared Israel's concerns about the JCPOA's perceived weaknesses and sunset provisions, and they advocate for a more restrictive agreement that also curbs Iran's missile capabilities and support for proxy groups.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)
Serves as the neutral, technical body responsible for monitoring and verifying nuclear activities; its reports provide the essential, objective data upon which all assessments of compliance and nuclear breakout timelines are based.

Past UN Actions

The international community's engagement with the Iranian nuclear issue and the JCPOA is documented in a series of key resolutions and reports:

UN Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015)
This is the cornerstone resolution that legally endorsed the JCPOA, established the specific timetable for the termination of previous UN sanctions, and created a dedicated procurement channel to regulate Iran's nuclear-related imports.

Previous UNSC Resolutions (1696, 1737, 1747, 1803)
This series of resolutions, adopted between 2006 and 2008, imposed progressively stricter sanctions on Iran for its non-compliance with IAEA safeguards and refusal to suspend enrichment activities. These were all terminated by the provisions of Resolution 2231.

IAEA Monitoring Reports
The Agency provides regular, detailed reports to its Board of Governors and the UNSC on the verification and monitoring of Iran's nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA and UNSCR 2231. These documents constitute the technical and factual basis for any international assessment of Iran's compliance.

DISEC/UNGA Resolutions
The First Committee annually deliberates on and adopts resolutions such as "The risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East," which highlights regional concerns, and others focused on "Strengthening the effectiveness of the security assurances of the nuclear-weapon States," which are directly relevant to the NPT's credibility.

QARMA (Questions A Resolution Must Answer)

1. How can the international community concretely restore trust in, and reinforce the authority of, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in light of this crisis, and what specific measures can be proposed to uphold the treaty's three pillars—non-proliferation, disarmament, and peaceful uses—in this context?
2. What specific, verifiable, and mutually agreed-upon sequence of incentives (such as phased sanctions relief) and disincentives can be proposed to secure Iran's return to full compliance with its non-proliferation obligations, and how can the economic benefits for Iran be guaranteed against future political shifts in other states?
3. What practical confidence-building measures, security assurances, or regional dialogue frameworks can be established to prevent further escalation and a potential nuclear arms race, while addressing the legitimate security concerns of all regional actors, including Israel and the Gulf states?
4. How can any potential revived or successor agreement be structurally "future-proofed" or made more resilient against the domestic political shifts and unilateral actions of its signatory states to prevent a repeat collapse?
5. What is the precise, proposed diplomatic pathway and realistic timeline for renewed negotiations, and which body or consortium of states should be mandated to oversee and mediate this process to ensure its continuity and legitimacy?

Agenda B: The Question of Preventing the Proliferation and Misuse of Biological Weapons in the 21st Century

Introduction to the Topic:

Biological weapons (BW), defined as pathogens, toxins, or other biological agents used with the intent to cause disease, death, or incapacitation in humans, animals, or plants, represent a unique and devastating category of threat to international security. Their distinct character arises from the relative ease of concealment, as they can be developed in small-scale laboratories that are difficult to distinguish from legitimate medical or research facilities, making them a potentially accessible and deniable tool for both state and nonstate actors. The dawn of the 21st century has been marked by breathtakingly rapid advancements in the life sciences, particularly in fields like gene editing (e.g., CRISPR) and synthetic biology, which promise revolutionary benefits for human medicine, agriculture, and industrial biotechnology. However, these very same technologies concomitantly and significantly lower the technical barriers to creating, modifying, and weaponizing dangerous pathogens. The global COVID-19 pandemic served as a stark and sobering demonstration of the catastrophic societal and economic potential of a widespread biological event, brutally exposing critical gaps in global preparedness, surveillance, and biosecurity. This agenda, therefore, challenges delegates to confront these vulnerabilities directly and to forge robust solutions for strengthening the entire international architecture dedicated to preventing the development, proliferation, and ultimate use of biological weapons.

Historical Context

The evolution of the international legal framework against biological warfare began with the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which specifically prohibited the use of bacteriological (biological) methods of warfare in international armed conflict. However, a critical loophole remained, as the Protocol did not ban the development, production, or possession of such weapons. The landmark treaty that sought to close this gap is the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), which entered into force in 1975. The BWC holds the historic distinction of being the first multilateral disarmament treaty to ban an entire category of weapons of mass destruction, with States Parties undertaking a solemn obligation "never in any circumstances to develop, produce, stockpile, or otherwise acquire or retain" biological agents or toxins that have no justification for prophylactic, protective, or other peaceful purposes. Despite its groundbreaking nature, a fundamental and enduring weakness was embedded in the BWC from its inception: the absence of a formal verification protocol to monitor and investigate compliance. Global concerns about the bioweapons threat were violently reignited by the 2001 anthrax letter attacks in the United States, which tragically demonstrated the potent and disruptive threat of bioterrorism. In response, a decade-long international effort to negotiate a legally binding verification protocol was undertaken, but this process collapsed in 2001 when the United States rejected the draft text, arguing it would be ineffective and risk compromising proprietary commercial information. This failure left the convention reliant on a system of voluntary Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs), a weakness that continues to plague the regime today.

Current Situation

The contemporary biosecurity landscape is defined by a convergence of unprecedented risks, primarily driven by the exponential pace of technological advancement. Rapid progress in biotechnology, synthetic biology, and artificial intelligence is dramatically amplifying the potential for the misuse of so-called "dual-use" research, legitimate scientific investigations that could also be readily applied to engineer more virulent, transmissible, or evasive pathogens.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided a real-world, devastating stress test of global health security, unequivocally highlighting the world's profound systemic vulnerability to biological threats and exposing critical deficiencies in pandemic preparedness, robust disease surveillance networks, and international response coordination. The dangerous synergy of these factors, the democratization of powerful and accessible technology, a structurally weak and politically divided international governance structure embodied by the BWC, and a recently demonstrated global susceptibility to biological disasters, creates a "perfect storm." In this high-stakes environment, the risks of biological weapons proliferation and their potential misuse by either state or non-state actors now pose a more immediate, complex, and difficult-to-detect threat to international peace and security than at any previous point in history.

Impacts

The proliferation of biological weapons capabilities and their potential use would unleash catastrophic, multi-dimensional consequences that extend far beyond the immediate target of an attack:

Threats to Global Health and Security
A deliberate, large-scale biological attack could inflict mass casualties and societal disruption on a scale comparable to a nuclear detonation, simultaneously crippling national healthcare infrastructures, paralyzing economies, and irrevocably eroding public trust in governmental and scientific institutions, thereby hampering an effective response.

Risk from State and Non-State Actors
The increasing accessibility and declining cost of biotechnology equipment and knowledge significantly lower the barrier to entry for non-state actors, including transnational terrorist networks, while sophisticated state-level offensive bioweapons programs remain a persistent and grave concern, as evidenced by historical precedents in the Soviet Union and Iraq.

Environmental and Agricultural Damage
Biological agents can be deliberately engineered to target staple crops or livestock, potentially triggering widespread famine, threatening global food security, and inflicting severe, long-term economic damage on agricultural sectors, with effects that could cross international borders.

Stifling of Beneficial Research
The imperative to implement stringent and necessary biosecurity measures creates a complex ethical and practical dilemma: overly restrictive regulations, while designed to prevent misuse, could inadvertently hinder or stifle vital, legitimate scientific research aimed at developing new vaccines, therapeutics, and agricultural innovations, thereby delaying critical advancements in public health and food security.

Key Stakeholders / Actors

States Parties to the BWC
With over 180 signatories, the convention boasts nearuniversal membership. However, this numerical strength belies significant disparities in implementation. Levels of engagement range from highly active participants with advanced national implementation measures to states with minimal technical, financial, or administrative capacity to enforce the treaty's provisions, creating uneven global protection and challenges in ensuring universal compliance.

P5 Nations (US, China, Russia, UK, France)
As permanent members of the UN Security Council and possessors of advanced biotechnology sectors, the political and technical cooperation of the P5 is indispensable for any substantive strengthening of the BWC regime. Their leadership can catalyze global norms and provide resources for capacity building. However, their geopolitical rivalries and mutual suspicions often manifest in diplomatic deadlock during review conferences, preventing consensus on critical issues such as verification and transparency measures.

World Health Organization (WHO)
The WHO is the lead international agency for coordinating the public health response to outbreaks, making it a cornerstone of global health security. Its expertise in surveillance, epidemiology, and containment is vital for mitigating the consequences of any biological event. A key limitation, however, is its mandate, which is focused on public health response rather than attribution; it lacks the legal authority and forensic capacity to investigate whether an outbreak is of natural or deliberate origin.

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA)
UNODA serves as the secretariat for the BWC, providing critical administrative and substantive support. It facilitates the organization of review conferences, meetings of experts, and helps to build national implementation capacity. While it is a central coordinating body for disarmament efforts, its influence is constrained by the political will of member states and it operates without independent investigative or enforcement powers.

Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Industries:
As the primary drivers of innovation in the life sciences, the private sector holds unparalleled technical expertise. Their cooperation is vital for developing practical biosecurity standards, screening protocols for DNA synthesis, and securing supply chains against misuse. Their engagement, however, must balance security imperatives with commercial interests, intellectual property rights, and the need to avoid stifling legitimate research and development.

Scientific and Academic Communities:
Researchers and academics operate on the front lines of the dual-use dilemma, generating the knowledge that can be used for both profound benefit and profound harm. They are essential for fostering a "culture of responsibility," developing and adhering to ethical codes of conduct, and integrating biosecurity awareness into scientific education. Their self-governance and commitment to ethical principles are a critical, non-governmental layer of defense against the misuse of science.

UN/General Assembly Resolutions

The international community has established a multi-layered, though imperfect, framework to address the threat of biological weapons

The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) of 1972
serves as the principal legal instrument prohibiting the development, production, and stockpiling of biological and toxin weapons. The governance of the BWC is conducted through quinquennial Review Conferences, where States Parties assess the treaty's implementation and seek to strengthen its provisions.

UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004)
a legally binding measure that obligates all UN Member States to adopt and enforce effective national laws to prevent the proliferation of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons to non-state actors. This resolution specifically mandates the establishment of domestic controls over related materials and the implementation of appropriate border security and accounting measures.

Further reinforcing these efforts are annual DISEC and UN General Assembly Resolutions. These include recurring resolutions on "The Convention on the Prohibition of Biological Weapons," which serve to express ongoing political support for the BWC and frequently call for more robust implementation. Parallel resolutions focused on "Countering the threat of bioterrorism" emphasize the non-state actor dimension and urge full compliance with UNSCR 1540. Despite these continued diplomatic efforts, ongoing discussions within various UN disarmament bodies have faced significant challenges. Achieving substantive, legally binding enhancements to the BWC—particularly in the area of a verification mechanism, has proven politically elusive, often hampered by geopolitical tensions and concerns over the protection of confidential commercial information and national security interests.

QARMA (Questions A Resolution Must Answer)

1. In the absence of a legally-binding verification protocol, how can the international community move beyond the current system of voluntary transparency?
2. What specific procedures can be established for initiating, mandating, and carrying out rapid and impartial investigations into allegations of non-compliance or suspicious disease outbreaks?
3. How can the authority for such investigations be structured to overcome political blockages, perhaps through a majority vote within a dedicated BWC subsidiary body or by empowering an existing international organization with a clear mandate?
4. How can the existing Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) be made more meaningful?
5. How can the BWC institutionalize a response mechanism that carries tangible political and economic costs for violators?
6. How can the international community facilitate the development and delivery of standardized training programs for laboratory biosafety officers, disease surveillance personnel, and first responders?