



**DUMUNC**  
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## **Background Guide**

Disarmament and International Security  
Committee (DISEC)



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## *Letter from the Dais*

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to DUMUNC XL! We're elated to have you here! Whether you're a longtime Model United Nations enthusiast or a newcomer to this exciting extracurricular event, we hope this committee will be productive, compelling, and (most importantly) fun for all involved!

The problems you will tackle and the crises that will arise over the course of the weekend will require out-of-the-box thinking and creative problem-solving on your behalf. We hope all the delegates can work together to create these innovative solutions. Most of all, we want you to enjoy this weekend while learning a lot about authoritarianism in the 21st century!

As your chairs, we hope to make this committee fun and memorable for everyone. We will work hard to make sure that everyone's voices are heard in both moderated and unmoderated debate. If any problems arise over the course of the committee, or if you have questions about DUMUNC or Duke in general feel free to ask at any time during the course of the conference. Good luck to you all and we hope you have a lot of fun this weekend!

Sincerely,

Harrison Walley & Melany Rojas

*Chairs, SOCHUM*

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## *Introduction*

At the center of the mission of the United Nations (UN) are democratic values. Though the UN does not explicitly endorse a single system of governance, the basic ideals of democracy—representation, rule of law, and human rights—are central in many UN foundational documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Charter of the United Nations (1945) (UN, 2023). The world, however, has largely seen democracy backsliding in the 21st century. Freedom House, a nonprofit organization that tracks and releases data relating to freedoms and democracy, has found that “Global freedom declined for the 19th consecutive year in 2024” (Freedom House, 2024). In 2022, Freedom House noted that the world was stuck at a crossroads between authoritarianism and democracy, writing, “Those countries that have struggled in the space between democracy and authoritarianism, meanwhile, are increasingly tilting toward the latter. The global order is nearing a tipping point, and if democracy’s defenders do not work together to help guarantee freedom for all people, the authoritarian model will prevail” (Freedom House, 2022).

Major authoritarian or semi-authoritarian actors have been highlighted in the media—for example, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and China’s increasingly bold outlook on Taiwan—but largely ignored have been the effects these powers have had on weak democracies. Autocratic movements strengthen and embolden each other, with the Atlantic Council writing, “Autocracies are unabashedly trying to create a world safe for autocrats. Authoritarian regimes across the globe are learning from one another and actively cooperating to crush democratic movements at home and rewrite international norms to advance their interests” (Atlantic Council, 2023). Countries around the world

have seen democratic backsliding or have otherwise felt its effects as neighboring nations have adopted increasingly authoritarian styles of governance. This is not a region-specific phenomenon. The University of Gothenburg finds, “The democratic decline has been most dramatic in the Pacific region, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. But the number of countries in the world that are currently experiencing democratic setbacks, or autocratization, has greatly increased over the past ten years—from 13 to 42 countries between 2002–2022” (V-Dem Institute, 2023).

While smaller, less geopolitically powerful nations often get overlooked in topics like these, they are central to the discussion. Powerful authoritarian nations often prey on smaller nations under the guise of economic or military cooperation. UC San Diego finds, “Authoritarian leaders are using regional organizations to their advantage or even forming their own regional clubs, like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Russia’s Eurasian Economic Union” (UC San Diego, 2024). Countries on either side of this topic (pro-democracy or pro-authoritarianism) have placed great importance on spreading their ideology to these less powerful nations, and delegates should consider them critical during committee and research.

As of March 2025, DISEC faces a world where authoritarianism threatens not only governance but also international peace and security—its core mandate. This committee must explore how rising authoritarianism destabilizes states, fuels conflict, and undermines disarmament efforts, proposing solutions to safeguard democracy.

## *Historical Background*

The tension between democracy and authoritarianism is not new, but its modern escalation traces back to the post-Cold War era. The 1990s saw a “third wave” of democratization, with countries transitioning from authoritarian rule—such as South Africa in 1994 and Poland in 1989 (Huntington, 1991). However, this wave began receding in the 21st century. The V-Dem Institute reports that by 2022, 72% of the world’s population lived in autocracies or hybrid regimes, up from 46% in 2012 (V-Dem Institute, 2023). Key events catalyzed this shift: the 2008 financial crisis eroded trust in democratic institutions, while Russia’s annexation of Crimea (2014) and China’s suppression of Hong Kong’s pro-democracy movement (2019–2020) emboldened authoritarian models (Freedom House, 2024).

Authoritarian regimes have increasingly collaborated to export their influence. Russia’s support for Syria’s Assad regime since 2015 and China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), tying nations like Pakistan and Cambodia to its orbit, exemplify this trend (CFR, 2024). The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), founded in 2001, and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), launched in 2015, have formalized autocratic alliances, offering economic incentives to weaker states (UC San Diego, 2024). Meanwhile, democratic backsliding has hit nations like Hungary, where Viktor Orbán’s “illiberal democracy” model gained traction since 2010, and Tunisia, where President Kais Saied dissolved parliament in 2021 (BBC, 2024).

Smaller nations often bear the brunt. In Africa, coups in Mali (2020), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023) reflect authoritarian contagion, often tied to Russian Wagner

Group influence (Al Jazeera, 2024). In Latin America, Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro has clung to power since 2013, exporting instability to neighbors like Colombia (CFR, 2024). The Pacific saw Fiji's 2006 coup legacy linger, while Myanmar's 2021 military takeover crushed a fragile democracy (Freedom House, 2024). Technology has amplified authoritarian reach. China's export of surveillance tools—used in Uganda and Zimbabwe—and Russia's disinformation campaigns, notably in Ukraine and the U.S. (2016 elections), erode democratic resilience (Atlantic Council, 2023). By 2025, hybrid warfare—combining cyberattacks, propaganda, and proxy militias—has destabilized states like Georgia and Moldova, where Russian-backed separatists thrive (Reuters, 2025).

The UN has a mixed record in addressing this trend. Early efforts focused on post-conflict democratization. In Cambodia, the UN Transitional Authority (UNTAC, 1992–1993) oversaw elections after decades of authoritarian rule, achieving a fragile democracy until Hun Sen's consolidation of power by 2017 (UN, 2023). In East Timor, the UN Transitional Administration (UNTAET, 1999–2002) successfully transitioned the state to independence and democracy, though economic fragility persists (UNDP, 2023). These missions, under Chapter VI and VII mandates, highlight DISEC's potential role in stabilizing democratic transitions, but they also reveal limits when local elites resist (CFR, 2024).

Case studies of UN action—or inaction—offer further lessons. In Rwanda (1994), the UN's failure to prevent genocide amid authoritarian collapse underscored the need for early intervention (UN, 2023). Contrastingly, the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK, 1999–2008) supported democratic institutions against Serbian authoritarian pressure,

though ethnic tensions linger (UNMIK, 2023). The 2005 World Summit Outcome Document reaffirmed democracy as a universal value, urging collective action, yet implementation faltered (UNGA, 2005). The Security Council’s paralysis—e.g., vetoes by Russia and China on Syria (2011–2024)—has shifted responsibility to bodies like DISEC and the General Assembly (CFR, 2024).

Specific DISEC interventions have tackled security threats tied to authoritarianism. The 2013 Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), shaped by DISEC discussions, aimed to curb arms flows to repressive regimes, though enforcement remains uneven—only 113 states had ratified it by 2024 (UNODA, 2024). In 2011, DISEC resolutions supported peacekeeping in Côte d’Ivoire, protecting democratic elections against Laurent Gbagbo’s authoritarian bid, a rare success (UN, 2023). Yet, failures loom large: DISEC’s inability to address Russian arms support to Belarus during 2020 protests allowed Alexander Lukashenko to crush dissent (Freedom House, 2024).

### **Case Study: Myanmar’s 2021 Coup and Lessons for DISEC**

Myanmar’s 2021 military coup offers a critical lens for DISEC’s current challenge. After a decade of democratic transition following 50 years of military rule, the Tatmadaw seized power on February 1, 2021, ousting the National League for Democracy (NLD) after its landslide election win (BBC, 2024). The coup triggered mass protests, met with brutal repression—over 4,000 deaths and 25,000 arrests by 2024 (Freedom House, 2024). Armed resistance escalated, with People’s Defense Forces (PDFs) clashing with the junta, displacing 2.3 million people by 2025 (UNHCR, 2025). The junta’s arms, sourced from China, Russia, and North Korea, fueled this conflict, bypassing UN sanctions weakened by vetoes (Reuters, 2025).



The UN response was fragmented. The General Assembly's June 2021 resolution (A/RES/75/287) called for an arms embargo and democratic restoration, but it was non-binding (UN, 2023). DISEC debated stricter measures, proposing monitoring of arms flows, yet China and Russia's opposition stalled action (CFR, 2024). ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus, endorsed by the UN, faltered as the junta ignored dialogue, exposing multilateral limits (Al Jazeera, 2024). By 2025, Myanmar's civil war threatens regional stability, with refugee flows straining Thailand and India, and junta-aligned militias trafficking arms and drugs across borders (Reuters, 2025).

This case informs DISEC's 2025 deliberations in several ways. First, it highlights the security ripple effects of authoritarian takeovers—arms proliferation, displacement, and regional destabilization—falling squarely within DISEC's mandate. Second, it underscores the challenge of enforcing arms controls when major powers shield violators, urging delegates to explore alternative mechanisms like enhanced ATT reporting or coalition-based sanctions. Third, Myanmar's resistance movements suggest a need for DISEC to consider support for pro-democracy forces, perhaps via capacity-building or humanitarian corridors, without direct military involvement. Finally, the junta's reliance on foreign arms and technology (e.g., Chinese surveillance) mirrors broader authoritarian tactics, pushing DISEC to address hybrid threats like disinformation and cyberattacks that entrench autocrats. Myanmar's lesson is clear: inaction risks escalation, while proactive, creative solutions could mitigate authoritarian fallout.

## *DISEC's Role in 2025*

In March 2025, DISEC confronts a world where authoritarianism directly undermines its mandate under Chapter VI of the UN Charter: preventing conflicts and promoting disarmament (UN, 2023). The committee's role is not to dictate governance but to address the security implications of democratic erosion. Freedom House's 2024 report warns of a "tipping point," with authoritarian states like Russia and Iran arming proxies—e.g., Houthi rebels in Yemen—while democratic setbacks in Mali and Sudan fuel regional arms races (Freedom House, 2024; CFR, 2025).

DISEC can leverage its authority to curb authoritarian-induced instability. Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine and subsequent hybrid operations in the Sahel demonstrate how autocracies exploit weak states, driving arms flows (Al Jazeera, 2025). China's military buildup near Taiwan, paired with its BRI-linked arms deals in Djibouti, escalates tensions (Reuters, 2025). DISEC could propose frameworks to monitor arms transfers to authoritarian regimes, building on the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) of 2013, ratified by 113 states by 2024 (UNODA, 2024).

Smaller nations are a priority. The Atlantic Council notes that autocracies target these states to expand influence, as seen with Russia's EAEU courting Armenia and Kyrgyzstan (Atlantic Council, 2023). DISEC might recommend capacity-building for democratic resilience—e.g., cybersecurity training to counter disinformation—or peacekeeping missions to stabilize coup-prone regions like West Africa (UN, 2023). Funding remains a hurdle, with the UN peacekeeping budget strained at \$6.45 billion in 2024 (UNDP, 2024).

Geopolitically, DISEC must navigate U.S.-China rivalry. The U.S. pushes democracy promotion, as seen in its 2025 Summit for Democracy revival, while China defends “sovereign governance” (State Department, 2025; Xinhua, 2025). Delegates must balance these poles, crafting resolutions that protect democracy without alienating key players. Success hinges on consensus among 193 member states, a challenge given authoritarian sympathies in nations like Egypt and Vietnam.

## *Additional Committee Information*

This simulation places delegates in DISEC on March 22, 2025, tasked with drafting resolutions to protect democracy amid rising authoritarianism. Each delegate represents a UN member state, balancing national interests with global security. The committee follows MUN parliamentary procedure, requiring a simple majority for resolutions.

Key stakeholders include:

- Democratic States: U.S., EU nations, Japan—pushing stability and disarmament.
- Authoritarian Powers: Russia, China, Iran—defending sovereignty, resisting intervention.
- Hybrid Regimes: Turkey, Hungary, Venezuela—pivotal swing votes.
- Smaller Nations: Mali, Fiji, Moldova—vulnerable to influence.

Crisis updates may introduce events like a coup in Chad or Russian cyberattacks in the Baltics. Position papers should detail national stances on democracy, authoritarianism, and security threats.

Questions to Consider

1. How does your country feel about authoritarianism? Is your country currently authoritarian? Has your country recently moved from authoritarianism to democracy? Does your country have a history of authoritarian rule?

2. How does your country feel about democracy? Is your country democratic? Is your country aligned with democracies? Is there a chance your country may shift, either from democratic to authoritarian or vice versa?
3. What can you do in committee to advance your country's ideals (e.g., promoting democracy, promoting authoritarianism, remaining neutral, or some hybrid position)?
4. How can DISEC address arms proliferation linked to authoritarian regimes without infringing on state sovereignty?
5. What role should DISEC play in supporting smaller nations against authoritarian influence—e.g., economic aid, peacekeeping, or tech support?
6. How can DISEC counter hybrid threats (disinformation, cyberattacks) that destabilize democracies?
7. What lessons from past UN efforts (e.g., ATT, peacekeeping in Kosovo) apply to this crisis?

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