

# BACKGROUND GUIDE



## UNGA - SPECIAL POLITICAL AND DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE

**Agenda:** Discussing the role of non-state military actors in conflict zones.



**LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

Esteemed Delegates,

It is the pleasure of the executive board to welcome you to the Fourth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly at Nath Valley Model United Nations. The agenda has political, economic, social, and legal implications, which makes it extremely interesting to discuss. This background guide has been created while keeping in mind that the agenda is extremely multifaceted, and you'll be tested based on both your analytical and research skills in the committee. This background guide is not intended and should not restrict your research base; additionally, the guide can in no way be used as a source of proof in the committee. The guide has been created to help you start your research and give you hints about the important aspects of the committee. Feel free to contact the executive board in case of queries.

The Executive Board looks forward to seeing you at the Conference! We wish you all the best.

Eklavya Dev

Chairperson

Mukulraj Vakil

Vice Chairperson

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Introduction to the Committee.....	4
Mandate of the Committee.....	6
Introduction to the Agenda .....	8
Background of the Agenda .....	10
Key Stakeholders .....	13
Past UN Resolutions .....	17
Questions a resolution must answer (QARMAS) .....	19
Bibliography.....	20



## **INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE**

The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL) is the Fourth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly. It was formed in 1990 when the Decolonization Committee and the Special Political Committee were combined. The UN established the “International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism” from 1990 to 2000, marking an important time for the UN’s decolonization work.

When the UN was founded, 750 million people lived under colonial rule. Since 1945, over 80 former colonies have gained independence, thanks in part to the work of the Fourth Committee. Today, fewer than two million people live in 17 Non-Self-Governing territories, and SPECPOL holds hearings with petitioners, including civil society organizations and private individuals, from these areas. SPECPOL also covers issues related to the Middle East, Palestinian refugees, and Israeli practices, as well as topics like the effects of atomic radiation, peacekeeping operations, space exploration, and international cooperation for peaceful uses of outer space.

The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL) is a relatively new committee. SPECPOL, also known as the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly (GA), was created in accordance with GA Resolution 47/233, adopted on August 17 1993. The new Special Political and Decolonization is a combination of the now defunct Special Political Committee and the previous Fourth Committee (the Decolonization Committee). Very little has changed regarding the terms and the focus of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee, but now SPECPOL also handles issues that previously overlapped in the two different committees.

SPECPOL primarily concerns itself with political destabilization within or between member nations and discusses the grievances that nations bring before the committee. It also deals with issues of the General Assembly that are related to the right to self-determination, decolonization, the use of UN peacekeeping forces, and other topics that are not dealt with by the Disarmament and International Security Committee (also known as the First Committee of the General Assembly).

In general, SPECPOL, like other GA committees, discusses those issues for which the Security Council may carry out enforceable decisions and measures such as economic sanctions. In other words, SPECPOL may not impose sanctions or authorise military actions in its resolutions.

## NATH VALLEY MUN 9.0

The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) considers a broad range of issues covering a cluster of five decolonization-related agenda items, the effects of atomic radiation, questions relating to information, a comprehensive review of the question of peacekeeping operations as well as a review of special political missions.



## **MANDATE OF THE COMMITTEE**

SPECPOL's mandate encompasses diverse topics ranging from eradicating colonialism and self-determination of people to promoting peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution. With its broad scope, the committee addresses issues such as the protection of citizens in the conflict zones and displaced persons, the prevention of arms proliferation, the advancement of democracy, and the safeguarding of human rights worldwide, keeping in mind the role of non-state military actors.

A detailed explanation of the SPECPOL mandate is listed below :

- **Decolonization:**

SPECPOL is primarily responsible for addressing issues related to decolonization and self-determination, including the rights of non-self-governing territories. The committee discusses the role of non-state military actors and their intent of colonisation.

- **Peacekeeping:**

The committee plays a role in reviewing and evaluating UN peacekeeping operations around the world. The most sought after goal of the committee is to ensure peace.

- **Peaceful Uses of Outer Space:**

SPECPOL deals with international cooperation and the peaceful utilization of outer space, including preventing an arms race there.

- **Atomic Radiation:**

The committee also considers the effects of atomic radiation and updates reports on the levels and impacts of radiation.

- **Other Political Issues:**

SPECPOL addresses a wide range of political issues, including those related to the Middle East, special political missions, and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The committee emphasises on analysing the role of non-state military actors in the conflict zones, ensuring that sovereignty and peace of each country is held intact.

- **Legislating Territorial Disputes:**

The committee is tasked with legislating how territorial disputes between nations are handled in the future. The territorial disputes may result in aggravating the conditions in

## NATH VALLEY MUN 9.0

the conflict zones, which is the primary concern of this committee, with respect to the agenda.

All the member states participating in the committee under SPECPOL make decisions. The resolutions and judgments voted on in SPECPOL are specific to decolonization subjects and need to be adopted by the UNGA in a plenary session to become official UNGA resolutions, even though they follow similar voting processes as the UNGA. Recommendations and conclusions from SPECPOL resolutions and judgments are typically communicated to the UNGA.

For UNGA adoption to be officially enforced and for the UNGA's power to be fully exercised, they must be adopted. Most of the decision-making process follows the general UNGA procedure with a simple majority and two-thirds majority for passing decisions. Routine decisions need a simple majority, meaning that the minimum requirement of half plus one member needs to agree with the decision being made. The two-thirds majorities are reserved for important decisions, such as amendments to the committee's rules of procedure or the adoption of particularly controversial resolutions.

*Seeking partnerships beyond borders*



## INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENDA

What are non-state military actors (NSMAs)?

Non-state military actors are individuals or groups that are not affiliated with any government but still have military capabilities or engage in military-related activities. They can be violent or non-violent, and their motivations and goals vary widely.

Non-state military actors have become increasingly prominent in contemporary conflict zones, playing complex and often controversial roles. These groups, which include militias, insurgent factions, rebels, paramilitary organizations, and private military contractors, operate independently of official state militaries. Their emergence is often driven by weak governance, political instability, or ethnic and religious divisions. In regions where central authority is compromised or absent, non-state actors may fill the power vacuum, exerting control over territory, resources, and populations.

	<b>Change vs. Status Quo</b>	<b>Territorial vs. Non-Territorial</b>	<b>Physical vs. Psychological Use of Violence</b>	<b>Political/Ideological vs. Profit-Driven Motivation</b>
<b>Rebels, Guerrillas</b>	Change	Territorial	Physical	Political
<b>Militias</b>	Status quo	Territorial Non-territorial	Physical Psychological	Political
<b>Clan Chiefs, Big Men</b>	Status quo	Territorial	Physical	Political
<b>Warlords</b>	Status quo	Territorial	Physical Psychological	Profit-driven

Fig. 1. Types of Non-State Military actors

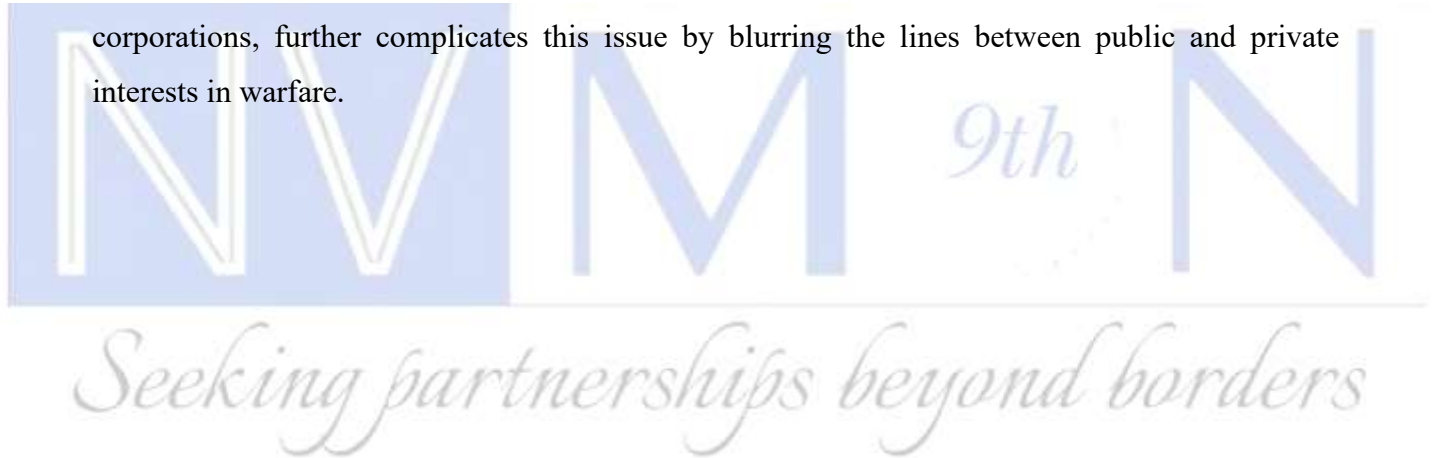
One of the most significant roles these actors play is in prolonging or intensifying conflicts. Equipped with varying degrees of training and resources, non-state groups can engage in guerrilla warfare, terrorism, or hybrid operations that challenge conventional militaries. Their decentralized nature and ability to blend into civilian populations often make them difficult to combat through traditional military means. As a result, conflicts involving such actors tend to be more protracted and complex, often drawing in regional and international stakeholders (which will be addressed on the latter part of the guide).



## NATH VALLEY MUN 9.0

Despite their disruptive potential, non-state military actors are not uniformly negative forces. In some cases, they have been instrumental in protecting vulnerable communities, especially when state institutions have failed to do so. Kurdish militias in Syria and Iraq, for instance, have played a significant role in combating the Islamic State when government forces were either incapable or unwilling. Similarly, local defense groups have emerged in parts of Africa to resist violent extremists like Boko Haram or al-Shabaab, offering some semblance of security to isolated populations.

However, the involvement of non-state military actors also raises serious concerns regarding accountability and the rule of law. Many such groups operate outside international legal frameworks, and their actions often include human rights violations, forced recruitment, and targeting of civilians. The rise of private military companies, which are contracted by states or corporations, further complicates this issue by blurring the lines between public and private interests in warfare.



## **BACKGROUND OF THE AGENDA**

Non-state military actors have become increasingly prominent in contemporary conflict zones, shaping the nature and dynamics of warfare in the 21st century. Unlike traditional state militaries, non-state actors are organizations or groups that operate independently of state control. These can include insurgent groups, militias, terrorist organizations, warlords, private military companies (PMCs), and even transnational criminal networks. Their rise has been fueled by political instability, state failure, ideological extremism, and the proliferation of weapons and technology.

Historically, wars were primarily waged between sovereign states. However, the post-Cold War era has seen a significant shift towards intrastate conflicts—civil wars and insurgencies—where non-state actors often play a central role. Conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo illustrate how non-state actors can control territory, govern populations, and challenge state sovereignty. Many countries in the middle-east have seen a rise in the number of non-state military actors post the Cold War era.

The motivations and objectives of these groups vary. Some seek to overthrow governments (e.g., the Taliban), while others aim to establish autonomous regions (e.g., Kurdish militias), pursue religious or ideological goals (e.g., ISIS, Boko Haram), or profit from instability (e.g., drug cartels or PMCs). Their presence often complicates peace processes, makes conflict resolution more challenging, and blurs the lines between combatants and civilians.

Here's an example of a similar situation in the middle east called the Axis of Resistance:

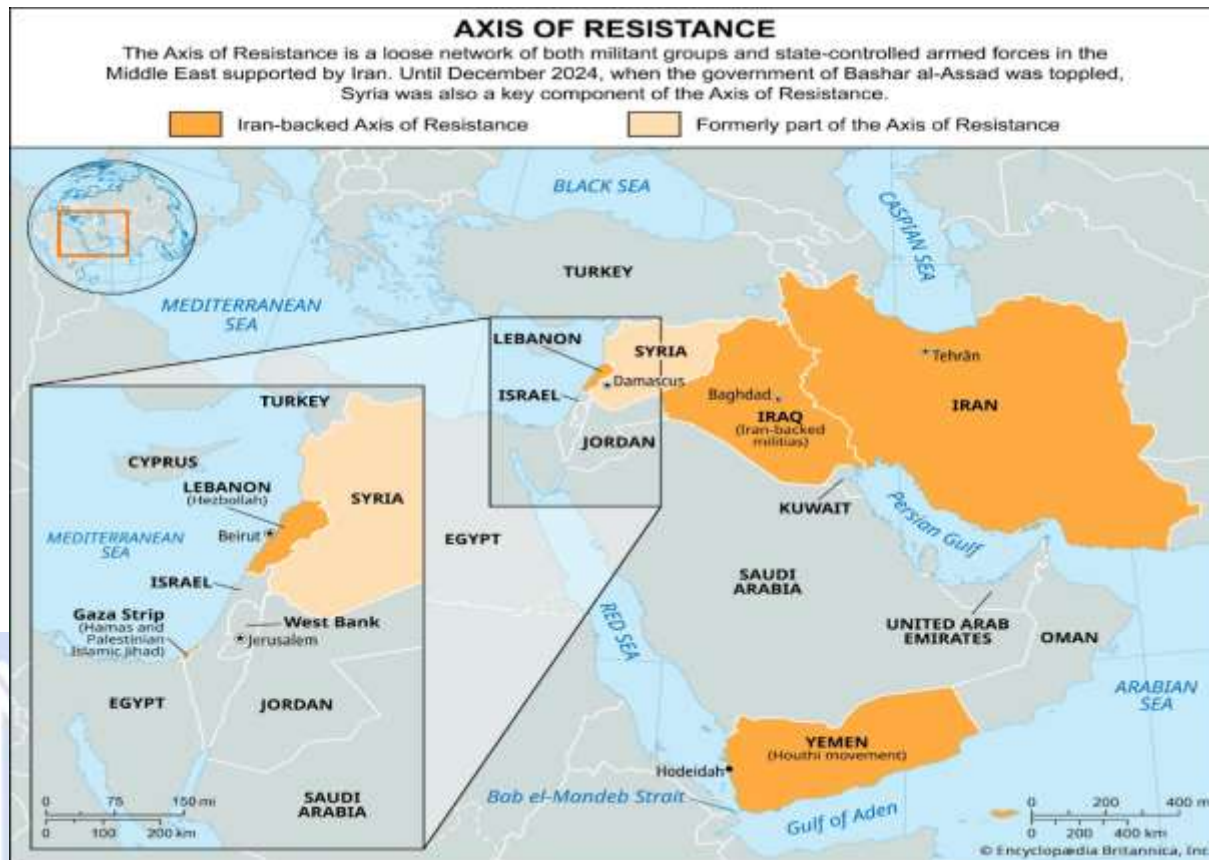


Fig.2. The Axis of Resistance

The Axis of Resistance is an informal coalition of Iranian-supported militant and political organizations across the Middle East. Formed by Iran, it unites actors committed to countering the influence of the United States and Israel in the region. Axis of Resistance, loose and informal military network of militant groups, which bill themselves as resistance forces, and state-controlled armed forces in the Middle East that are supported by Iran and its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). In addition to the IRGC, the axis comprises Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, certain militias in Iraq, and Houthi forces in Yemen.

Until December 2024, when the government of Bashar al-Assad was toppled, the Syrian armed forces had been a key component of the axis and allowed unfettered access between Iran and the Mediterranean Sea. The name used by the network seems to have originated as a response to U.S. Pres. George W. Bush's term "axis of evil," which referred to Iraq under Saddam Hussein, Iran,

## NATH VALLEY MUN 9.0

and North Korea, nonaligned countries that the United States considered to be uniquely bellicose. The interests of the axis members are regional in scope, aligning with Iran (one of the most influential powers in the Middle East) in opposition to Israel and Saudi Arabia as well as the United States for its interference in the region's balance of power. Each group in the network acts independently of one another and is motivated by its own self-interest, but the network coordinates in training, attaining weaponry, and supporting one another in achieving common goals. This is a short brief about the example of the Axis of Resistance.

The involvement of NSMAs has several profound implications on the world:

1. Prolongation of Conflicts: NSMAs often defy peace processes or ceasefires, aiming instead for total ideological or territorial dominance.
2. Civilian Harm and Humanitarian Crises: These actors frequently use guerrilla tactics, terrorism, or civilian shields, contributing to large-scale human rights abuses.
3. Complicated Diplomacy and Peacebuilding: Engaging with NSMAs diplomatically is often contentious, as it may confer legitimacy to groups accused of terrorism or war crimes.
4. Intervention Challenges: For external actors (e.g., the UN or NATO), determining whom to negotiate with or target becomes more complex in the absence of clear state adversaries.

In recent years, the involvement of non-state actors has expanded through the use of cyber warfare, information campaigns, and transnational funding networks. They also frequently benefit from external support from states that use them as proxies to advance geopolitical interests. This has raised serious legal and ethical concerns under international law, particularly regarding accountability, human rights violations, and the laws of armed conflict.

Understanding the role of non-state military actors is essential for formulating effective peacebuilding, counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism strategies. This agenda calls for international dialogue and cooperation to address the underlying causes of their emergence and to develop mechanisms for managing their impact on global and regional security.

**KEY STAKEHOLDERS**

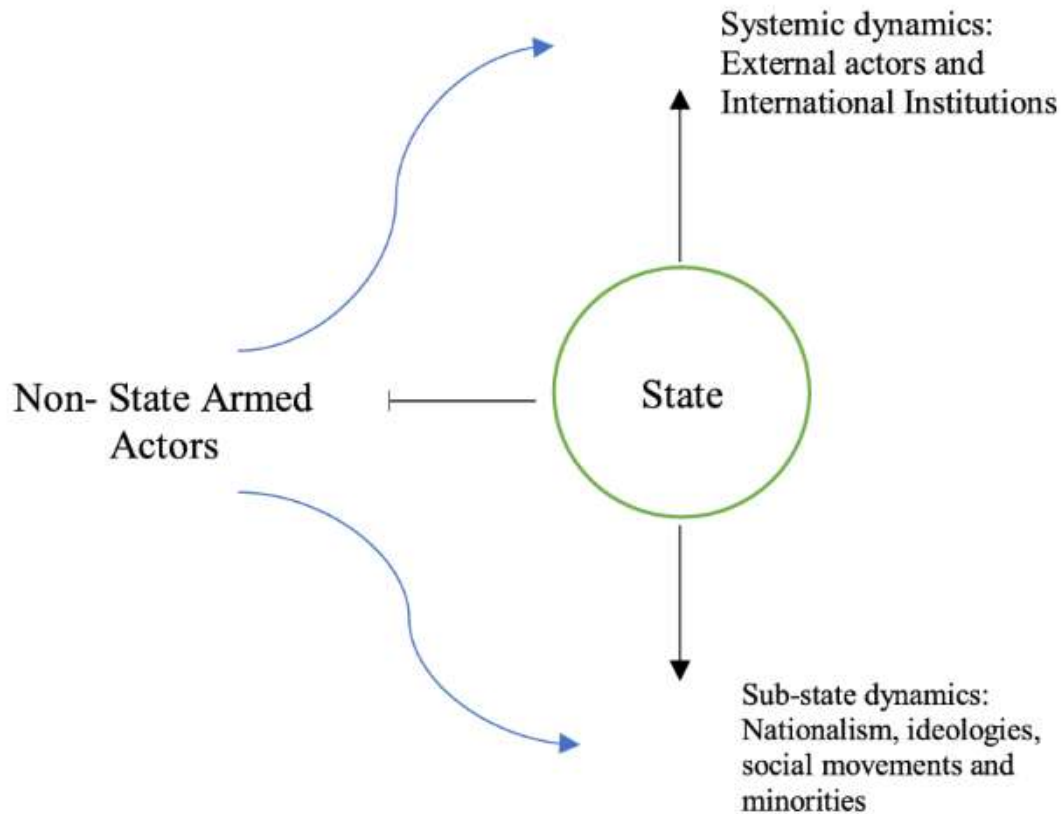


Fig.3. The Outcomes of NSMAs

The evolving role of non-state military actors (NSMAs) in modern warfare and conflict zones has created a complex web of stakeholders with overlapping, often competing interests. These stakeholders span across governments, international organizations, local communities, private entities, and non-state actors themselves, all of whom are affected by or engaged with the activities of NSMAs.

The key stakeholders of the given agenda are:

### 1. Sovereign States and National Governments

Sovereign states, particularly those experiencing internal conflict, are among the most directly affected stakeholders.

- A. Host Governments: Countries like Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of Congo have seen significant territorial and political threats from NSMAs. These governments often struggle to maintain control, legitimacy, and territorial sovereignty in the face of insurgency or rebel governance.
- B. Supporting or Opposing States: Regional powers (e.g., Iran, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Turkey, the United States) may back NSMAs for geopolitical reasons. For instance, Iran supports Hezbollah, while Turkey has supported various militia groups in Syria. These involvements often intensify and internationalize internal conflicts.
- C. Western Democracies and Allied Nations: Countries such as the U.S., UK, and France are involved due to their strategic interests or peacekeeping commitments. They often lead military interventions or counterterrorism operations, and fund stabilization or disarmament programs.

### 2. Non-State Military Actors Themselves

The NSMAs are not just subjects of analysis but active agents and key stakeholders.

- A. Insurgent and Rebel Groups: Groups like the Taliban, Houthis, and Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) act with political ambitions, often aiming to overthrow regimes or establish autonomous regions. These actors challenge the state's monopoly on violence and governance.
- B. Terrorist Organizations: Entities such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Boko Haram operate across borders and pursue ideological warfare. Their tactics typically include terror attacks, recruitment propaganda, and destabilization of regions, drawing global counter-terror efforts.
- C. Ethno-separatist Militias: Many NSMAs emerge from ethnic or religious tensions, such as the Kurdish YPG or Myanmar's ethnic armed organizations. These actors often demand regional autonomy or protection of minority rights.



- D. Private Military Companies (PMCs): Firms like the Wagner Group (Russia), Blackwater (now Constellis, U.S.), and others operate as for-profit entities, providing security services, training, and combat operations. These are stakeholders often linked to powerful state or corporate interests.

### 3. International and Regional Organizations

Organizations that work to maintain peace, promote development, and protect human rights play critical roles.

- A. United Nations (UN): Through bodies like the UN Security Council, UNHCR, UNDP, and peacekeeping missions (e.g., MONUSCO in the DRC), the UN actively engages in conflict zones affected by NSMAs. It also works on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs.
- B. NATO and Regional Security Alliances: NATO's operations in Afghanistan, and African regional efforts like AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia), highlight military coalitions' roles in managing NSMA threats.
- C. International Humanitarian Agencies: Organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), and World Food Programme (WFP) often negotiate access with NSMAs to deliver aid and protect civilians.
- D. Legal and Normative Bodies: The International Criminal Court (ICC) and other human rights mechanisms aim to hold NSMAs accountable for war crimes, although jurisdictional and enforcement limitations often exist.

### 4. Civilian Populations and Local Communities

Local civilians are the most vulnerable stakeholders and bear the brunt of NSMA activities.

- A. Displaced Populations: Millions are internally displaced or forced into refugee status due to violence inflicted or intensified by NSMAs, as seen in Syria, Yemen, and the Sahel.
- B. Community Leaders and Local Authorities: In some areas, NSMAs become de facto authorities, collecting taxes or providing services. Local leaders must negotiate with these groups for the community's survival or to retain influence.



## NATH VALLEY MUN 9.0

- C. Victims of Human Rights Violations: Women, children, and ethnic minorities are often disproportionately targeted through sexual violence, forced recruitment, and massacres. These communities become both stakeholders and the focus of protection efforts.

### 5. Media, Academia, and Civil Society

These stakeholders influence public perception, document conflict narratives, and pressure decision-makers.

- A. Media Outlets: Investigative journalism plays a role in exposing NSMA activities, war crimes, and international complicity or negligence. However, the media can also be manipulated by propaganda from either states or NSMAs.
- B. Research Institutions and Think Tanks: Scholars and policy researchers help analyze the root causes and solutions to NSMA proliferation, producing reports that inform UN and government policies.
- C. NGOs and Advocacy Groups: Human rights organizations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Crisis Group work to document violations, support victims, and lobby for accountability and international action.

To understand the depth of the agenda, realising the importance of the key stakeholders is quite necessary. NSMAs have had a deep impact on the society at large, especially in the middle-eastern and the African countries, causing a drift in the opinions of the people.

## **PAST UN RESOLUTIONS**

The UN Security Council has passed several resolutions addressing non-state military actors, primarily focused on preventing them from acquiring weapons of mass destruction. Key resolutions include 1540 (2004), which requires States to prevent proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons to non-state actors, and 2325 (2016) , which calls for a framework to prevent terrorists and other non-state actors from acquiring these weapons.

The UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004) :

In resolution 1540 (2004), the Security Council decided that all States shall refrain from providing any form of support to non-State actors that attempt to develop, acquire, manufacture, possess, transport, transfer or use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and their means of delivery, in particular for terrorist purposes. The resolution requires all States to adopt and enforce appropriate laws to this effect as well as other effective measures to prevent the proliferation of these weapons and their means of delivery to non-State actors, in particular for terrorist purposes.

A Security Council Committee was established pursuant to resolution 1540 (1540 Committee), which is tasked to report to the Security Council on the implementation of the resolution. On 30 November 2022, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2663 (2022). In doing so, the Council extended the mandate of its subsidiary 1540 Committee, for a period of ten years until 30 November 2032.

The UN Security Council Resolution 2325 (2016) :

Unanimously adopting resolution 2325 (2016), the Council called on all States to strengthen national anti-proliferation regimes in implementation of resolution 1540 (2004) — which seeks to keep non-State actors from acquiring nuclear, biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction — and to submit timely reports on their efforts. It called for greater assistance for building State capacity in that regard, including through voluntary contributions, and for greater cooperation among all stakeholders, civil society and academia among them.

Also by that text, the Council endorsed a recent review of such efforts (document S/2016/1013). Its findings included an increase in the number of legally binding measures adopted

## NATH VALLEY MUN 9.0

by States with the aim of preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, but also a lack of progress towards securing the production, use, storage and transportation of materials related to chemical and biological threats. There had been uneven progress across regions in that regard. There was a risk of the weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of non-State actors, and called for full implementation of the resolution just adopted as well as 1540 (2004); mentioned above.



**QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER (QARMAS)**

1. What are the root causes that lead to the rise of NSMAs in conflict zones?
2. How can the international community effectively regulate or engage with NSMAs without legitimizing them unnecessarily?
3. What role should national governments play in addressing NSMAs, and how can international support be structured?
4. What accountability mechanisms should be created or strengthened for NSMAs committing war crimes or crimes against humanity?
5. What safeguards must be established to prevent the misuse of private military companies in conflict zones?
6. How can cross-border cooperation between states be strengthened to contain or eliminate NSMAs?
7. How can economic and social development be used as tools to reduce NSMA influence and recruitment?



**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

1. Armed Non -State actors <https://www.geneva-academy.ch/research/our-clusters/non-state-actors/detail/4-armed-non-state-actors-and-the-human-rights-council>
2. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/private-military-firm>
3. University of Oxford <https://conflictplatform.ox.ac.uk/cccp/research/michael-von-der-schulenburg-the-era-of-armed-non-state-actors-risks-of-global-chaos>
4. United Nations Human Rights Commission. (2019). Global trends. Forced displacement in 2018. UNHRC, Accessed: 14 February 2020. URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/dach/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2019/06/2019-06-07-Global-Trends-2018.pdf>
5. <https://www.brookings.edu/events/the-evolution-of-nonstate-armed-actors-in-the-middle-east/>
6. <https://www.uscifr.gov/publications/did-you-knownon-state-actors>
7. UN Security Council <https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/sc1540>
8. UN Press <https://press.un.org/en/2016/sc12628.doc.htm>
9. <https://www.hurstpublishers.com/book/violent-non-state-actors-in-world-politics/>
10. <https://wjpcenter.org/topic/non-state-actors/>
11. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X25000014>

*Seeking partnerships beyond borders*