The Winchester School Jebel Ali

United Nations Security Council

Agenda 1 : Strengthening biosecurity through the development of strategies to prevent accidental or intentional release of synthetic viruses for bioterrorism

Letter from the Chairs

Dearest delegates,

A very warm welcome to The United Nations Security Council at WINMUN 2024. Despite MUN being a competitive conference, at the end of the day, what matters most is the experience, learning, and friends that you make along the way. Remember, you will find yourself in heated debates, power-play, and in direct opposition with the interests of other delegates. However, we highly recommend that you maintain a diplomatic spirit and work in collaboration to advocate for progress. Not to worry, the UNSC dias will be there to assist and guide you every step of the way.

We are thrilled to be moderating the discussion of the agendas “Strengthening biosecurity through the development of strategies to prevent accidental or intentional release of synthetic viruses for bioterrorism” and "Responding to the increased deployment of PMCs in conflict zones". We expect these topics to spark passionate speeches and debates as well as produce several carefully thought-out resolutions owing to past world occurrences. During the conference, we hope to see active participation, relevant points, and strong opinions expressed by delegates. While all committees at WINMUN, require delegates to know their country's stance in relevance to the topic, UNSC is the epitome of Peace-keeping and security for the world and you the delegates are the one that will enforce it

For the smooth functioning of this conference, we hope that all delegates are well versed with the rules of procedure, topic, and mandate of the committee and are innovative as well as practical with their approach to solving these issues.

Delegates, please be mindful that this background guide is only the beginning of your venture into research. You are expected to further carry out detailed and elaborate research independently; look into the contributions of your countries, local policies, and stances, and come up with influential and effective solutions that could potentially produce significant outcomes. Looking forward to meeting all of you and engaging in fruitful and lively committee sessions with everyone.

Warmest regards,
Advaith Shetty & Pranav Pramod
Dias of UNSC

Vocabulary

Synthetic Biology:

Synthetic biology involves the application of engineering principles to design and construct new biological entities or redesign existing biological systems for specific purposes. It refers to the potential creation of synthetic viruses for various applications, including bioterrorism.

Bioterrorism:

Bioterrorism is the deliberate use of biological agents, such as viruses, bacteria, or toxins, with the intent to cause harm, fear, or disruption. it underscores the intentional release of synthetic viruses for nefarious purposes.

Biosecurity:

Are measures and protocols implemented to protect against the theft, misuse, or release of biological agents that could pose a threat to public health or national security. It focuses on strategies to prevent the accidental or intentional release of synthetic viruses.

Dual-Use Research of Concern (DURC):

refers to scientific research with the potential for both beneficial and harmful applications. DURC highlights research activities that could be misused for bioterrorism or pose security and ethical concerns.

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs):

Genetically Modified Organisms are living entities whose genetic material has been altered in a way that does not occur naturally. GMOs may include engineered microbes with modified characteristics, posing potential threats.

Technology Transfer:

Technology transfer involves the sharing or exchange of knowledge, skills, or technologies between entities.Responsible technology transfer ensures

that expertise in synthetic biology is shared without contributing to the development of bioweapons or other harmful applications.

CRISPR-Cas9:

CRISPR-Cas9 is a revolutionary gene-editing technology that allows precise modification of DNA sequences. CRISPR-Cas9 is a tool that can be used to engineer viruses for various purposes, including potentially harmful applications like bioterrorism.

Zoonotic Diseases:

Zoonotic diseases are infectious diseases that can be transmitted between animals and humans. Understanding zoonotic diseases is essential as they can serve as potential sources for engineered pathogens.

International Health Regulations (IHR):

International Health Regulations are a set of legally binding regulations that guide countries on how to prevent and respond to public health emergencies. In biosecurity, adherence to IHR is essential for international cooperation in addressing the accidental or intentional release of synthetic viruses.

Viral Agents:

Viruses like smallpox and Ebola have been considered for bioweapon development due to their high virulence and potential for rapid transmission. Genetic engineering could enhance their capabilities, posing serious threats to public health.

Bacterial Agents:

Pathogenic bacteria such as anthrax (Bacillus anthracis) and plague (Yersinia pestis) can be weaponized for widespread illness and death. These agents are attractive due to their ability to be disseminated as spores and their potential for aerosolization.

Introduction to Agenda

The emergence of synthetic biology, characterised by rapid technological advancements, offers unprecedented opportunities and, simultaneously, poses grave risks to global security and public health. As we gather to deliberate on the imperative of Strengthening Biosecurity against the Accidental or Intentional Release of Synthetic Viruses for Bioterrorism, it is imperative to acknowledge the potential consequences arising from the convergence of scientific progress and malicious intent. Historical incidents underscore the urgency of formulating robust strategies to prevent the misuse of synthetic biology.

Historically, instances of accidental or intentional pathogen releases have exposed vulnerabilities in our global security apparatus. The anthrax attacks in the United States in 2001 demonstrated the potential for bioterrorism to exploit weaknesses in response mechanisms. The Aum Shinrikyo cult's attempt to release biological agents in 1995 highlighted the cross-border nature of bioterror threats. Ongoing debates surrounding Dual-Use Research of Concern (DURC) and gain-of-function research accentuate the ethical and security challenges associated with advancements in synthetic biology.

The absence of a comprehensive international regulatory framework stands out as a significant issue, leaving gaps that could be exploited by those seeking to develop and deploy synthetic viruses for bioterrorism. The dual-use dilemma inherent in many synthetic biology advancements necessitates careful consideration of the balance between scientific progress and security imperatives. Disparities in technological capabilities among nations create vulnerabilities, making capacity building and responsible technology transfer imperative. Ensuring a rapid and coordinated global response to synthetic virus outbreaks requires strengthening surveillance, information-sharing mechanisms, and response capabilities.

Turning to historical incidents, the Sverdlovsk Anthrax Leak in 1979 saw the accidental release of anthrax spores in the Soviet Union, resulting in an outbreak that claimed at

least 66 lives. This incident underscored the potential dangers associated with mishandling biological agents within research and production facilities. The Tokaimura Nuclear Facility Incident in 1999, while not directly related to bioweapons, involved the accidental release of radiation in Japan, emphasising the risks associated with mishandling dangerous materials and the importance of stringent safety measures. In 2001, the United Kingdom experienced a major outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, showcasing the economic and social impact of a biological event and prompting a reevaluation of biosecurity measures.

Examining the types of bioweapons, bacterial agents such as anthrax and plague can be weaponized for widespread illness and death due to their ability to be disseminated as spores and their potential for aerosolization. Viral agents like smallpox and Ebola, known for their high virulence and rapid transmission, have been considered for bioweapon development. Toxins derived from living organisms, such as botulinum toxin and ricin, can be employed as lethal weapons even in small quantities. Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) present a new threat, as advances in synthetic biology enable the modification of organisms for use as bioweapons. Additionally, dual-use technologies, including gene-editing tools like CRISPR-Cas9, raise concerns as they provide the means to modify pathogens for nefarious purposes. Addressing these diverse threats necessitates a comprehensive understanding of both historical incidents and the evolving landscape of bioweapon development. The international community must collaborate to establish stringent regulations, promote transparency in research activities, and enhance global preparedness to prevent and respond to the accidental or intentional release of synthetic viruses for bioterrorism.

In addressing these key issues, the international community must confront the dual challenge of fostering scientific progress while mitigating the risks associated with the misuse of synthetic biology. The UNSC has a unique opportunity to spearhead efforts that

transcend national boundaries, reinforcing global biosecurity against the accidental or intentional release of synthetic viruses for bioterrorism.

Key Stakeholders

1. United States of America (USA):

The United States has been at the forefront of addressing biosecurity and bioterrorism threats. It has implemented various measures to prevent the accidental or intentional release of synthetic viruses. The country has established regulatory frameworks, such as the Select Agent Program, to regulate the possession, use, and transfer of dangerous biological agents. The USA has also invested in research and development of advanced detection and diagnostic technologies.

Notable incidents include the anthrax attacks in 2001, where letters containing anthrax spores were sent through the mail, to several media outlets and politicians, resulting in several deaths. In response, the USA strengthened its biodefense capabilities, increased funding for research and development, and established the National Biosurveillance Integration Center to enhance early detection and response to bioterrorism threats.The US has also faced several outbreaks of infectious diseases, including the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, the 2014 Ebola outbreak, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic

The USA has taken several actions to address this issue. It has invested in research and development of advanced detection systems, improved laboratory safety standards, and implemented stringent regulations for the handling and transport of high-risk biological materials. It has also played a leading role in promoting international cooperation and information sharing through initiatives such as the Global Health Security Agenda.

2 United Kingdom (UK):

The United Kingdom recognizes the importance of biosecurity and has taken significant measures to prevent the accidental or intentional release of synthetic viruses. The country has implemented strict regulations and oversight systems for laboratory safety and biocontainment. It has also established the National Counter Terrorism Security Office to provide guidance on security measures.

In the past, the UK faced incidents such as the ricin plot in 2003, where individuals were arrested for planning to produce the deadly toxin ricin. The UK responded by strengthening its counterterrorism capabilities, enhancing surveillance systems, and increasing public awareness about bioterrorism risks.

The UK has faced incidents related to laboratory safety, such as the accidental release of foot-and-mouth disease virus from a research facility in 2007. This incident led to a thorough review of laboratory safety practices and the implementation of stricter regulations and oversight.

The UK has implemented various measures to address this issue. It has invested in upgrading laboratory infrastructure, enhancing training programs for researchers, and establishing robust systems for risk assessment and surveillance. The country actively participates in international collaborations and shares its expertise in biosecurity through initiatives like the UK Biological Security Strategy.

3. China:

China acknowledges the threat of bioterrorism and has taken steps to strengthen biosecurity. The country has implemented regulations and protocols for laboratory safety, biocontainment, and pathogen research. China has also developed the National Biosafety Laboratory, which is equipped to handle the most dangerous pathogens, including the Ebola virus

China has established the National Health Commission in 2018 to improve its biosafety and biosecurity. While there have been no significant incidents of bioterrorism in China, the country has faced challenges related to biosafety, such as the accidental release of the SARS virus from a research facility in 2004 this resulted in 774 deaths..China responded by improving laboratory safety protocols, enhancing training programs, and increasing regulatory oversight.

In 2021, China passed the Biosecurity Law, which stipulates the establishment of 11 basic systems for biosecurity risk prevention and control, including biosecurity risk monitoring and early warning, risk investigation and assessment, information sharing and information release.

China has incorporated medical biotechnology-related biosafety and biosecurity into the national strategic goals of a “People-Centered” approach to establish and foster an ecological civilization, particularly in the aftermath of the “He Jiankui affair”1. The country follows the “precautionary principle” as it thinks that uncertainty in science and technology should not be used to justify delaying the adoption of measures to prevent injuries or dangers, stating that whoever advances biotechnology must face the burden of proof of no harm1.

China has emerged as a key player in the field of biosecurity and has made significant progress in preventing the accidental or intentional release of synthetic viruses.China has faced incidents related to laboratory safety and biosecurity, with reported cases of accidental releases and infections in research facilities. These incidents have prompted the Chinese government to strengthen its efforts in biosecurity and invest in research infrastructure and training programs.

To address this issue, China has taken several actions. It has implemented stricter regulations on the handling and transport of dangerous pathogens, improved laboratory safety standards, and invested in advanced detection and surveillance systems. China actively participates in international collaborations, shares its expertise, and contributes to global efforts in biosecurity.

4. Russia:

Russia has been actively involved in addressing the issue of biosecurity and preventing the release of synthetic viruses. The country has a well-established regulatory framework and guidelines for dual-use research. It has implemented strict controls on the handling and transport of biological materials and has protocols in place for risk assessment and surveillance.

Russia recognizes the importance of biosecurity and actively participates in international efforts to prevent the accidental or intentional release of synthetic viruses. The country has implemented strict regulations and guidelines for laboratory safety and biocontainment. It has also established the State Research Center of Virology and Biotechnology VECTOR, a high-security facility for research on dangerous pathogens.

Russia has stringent standards to prevent accidents at high-containment facilities, and the Sanitary and Epidemiological Regulations SP 1.3.1285-03 on “Safe handling of microorganisms in pathogenic hazard groups I-II” describe the procedures to follow in response. Russia has also established the Federal Service for Surveillance on Consumer Rights Protection and Human Wellbeing (Rospotrebnadzor) in 2004 to improve its biosafety and biosecurity. In 1979, an accidental release of anthrax spores from a Soviet military facility in Sverdlovsk resulted in the deaths of at least 68 people.

In the past,, Russia has faced incidents related to laboratory safety and biosecurity, including accidental releases and infections. These incidents have led to a reassessment of safety protocols and the implementation of stricter regulations.

Such as the accidental release of foot-and-mouth disease virus from a research facility in 2007. The country responded by reviewing and strengthening safety protocols, enhancing training for researchers, and improving biosecurity infrastructure.

To address this issue, Russia has taken several actions. It has invested in improving laboratory infrastructure, enhancing training programs for researchers, and strengthening its regulatory framework. Russia actively participates in international forums and collaborations related to biosecurity, such as the Biological Weapons Convention, to contribute to global efforts in preventing bioterrorism.

5.Germany:

Germany places high importance on biosecurity and has implemented comprehensive measures to prevent the accidental or intentional release of synthetic viruses.The country has a comprehensive regulatory framework and guidelines for dual-use research. It emphasizes risk assessment, laboratory safety, and biocontainment measures.

Germany has taken several measures to prevent accidental or intentional release of synthetic viruses for bioterrorism. The country has established the Biological Agents Ordinance (BioStoffV) in 1999 to protect workers from risks to their safety and health while performing activities involving biological agents1. The BioStoffV covers aspects of “Laboratory Biosafety”

and “Laboratory Biosecurity” . The ordinance classifies biological agents into four risk groups based on their level of risk of infection, hazard to workers, spreading or not to the community, and possibilities of prevention and treatment. The German government has also established the German Biosecurity Programme in 2013 as part of the G7 Global Partnership against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction3.

In terms of incidents, there have been several cases of bioterrorism in Germany. In 2018, a Tunisian man was arrested in Cologne for planning a bioterrorism attack using the deadly poison ricin4. In 2011, a group of neo-Nazis in Germany were found to be plotting a bioterrorism attack using the deadly poison ricin5. In 2009, a man in Germany was arrested for attempting to sell the deadly poison ricin to an undercover police officer6. These incidents highlight the need for strong biosafety and biosecurity measures to prevent bioterrorism attacks.

To address this issue, Germany has taken several actions. It has invested in improving laboratory infrastructure, enhancing training programs for researchers, and establishing a robust oversight system. Germany actively participates in international collaborations, shares its expertise, and contributes to global efforts in biosecurity through initiatives like the Global Health Security Agenda.

Key Issues

1. Risk Assessment and Surveillance:

Understanding the risks associated with synthetic viruses and establishing effective surveillance systems are vital for preventing their release. Risk assessment involves identifying potential vulnerabilities, evaluating emerging technologies, and analyzing the potential impact of a synthetic virus release. Surveillance systems aim to monitor and detect any suspicious activities or trends related to bioterrorism. By collecting and analysing data, authorities can identify high-risk areas, anticipate threats, and develop appropriate response strategies.

The importance of risk assessment and surveillance lies in their ability to provide early warning signs and enable proactive measures to prevent bioterrorism incidents. These systems allow governments and international organizations to allocate resources effectively, prioritize research and development efforts, and coordinate response plans. Without proper risk assessment and surveillance, the detection and mitigation of potential threats become significantly challenging.

While progress has been made in the establishment of risk assessment and surveillance frameworks, further improvements are necessary. International collaboration and information sharing play a crucial role in enhancing these systems. Additionally, ensuring adequate funding for research and development, technology sharing, and capacity building in developing countries are important steps towards strengthening global biosecurity.

2. Regulation and Governance:

Establishing robust regulatory frameworks and governance mechanisms is essential to prevent accidental or intentional release of synthetic viruses. Regulations help ensure responsible conduct in synthetic biology research and development, control the transfer of sensitive technologies, and enforce compliance with ethical and safety standards. Effective governance mechanisms provide oversight, monitoring, and enforcement of these regulations at national and international levels.

The importance of regulation and governance lies in their ability to provide a legal and ethical framework for the responsible use of synthetic biology. They help prevent the misuse of research findings, protect public safety, and maintain public trust in scientific advancements. Moreover, these mechanisms foster international collaboration and coordination, as they provide a common basis for countries to work together in addressing biosecurity threats.

Although some countries have implemented regulatory measures, inconsistencies and gaps in regulations persist. Harmonising and standardising regulations at the international level is crucial to ensure a unified approach to biosecurity. Strengthening regulatory frameworks, enhancing compliance monitoring, and promoting international cooperation are essential steps towards effectively addressing this key issue.

3. Dual-Use Research and Technology Transfer:

Dual-use research refers to scientific research that can have both beneficial and harmful applications. It poses a unique challenge in preventing the accidental or intentional release of synthetic viruses. Managing the potential misuse of research findings and controlling technology transfer are critical aspects in this regard.

The importance of addressing dual-use research lies in striking a balance between scientific progress and minimizing the risks associated with misuse. Promoting responsible conduct among scientists, researchers, and institutions is crucial. Establishing guidelines, codes of conduct, and ethical review processes can help identify potential risks early on and address them appropriately.

Efforts have been made to create guidelines and codes of conduct for dual-use research. However, the implementation and enforcement of these measures are still inconsistent across countries and institutions. Strengthening international cooperation, raising awareness among researchers and institutions, and promoting responsible conduct can help address this key issue effectively.

4. Laboratory Safety and Biocontainment:

Ensuring proper laboratory safety and biocontainment measures are in place is crucial to prevent accidental releases of synthetic viruses. Laboratories are the primary sites where synthetic viruses are created and studied, making them potential sources of accidental release. Strict adherence to safety protocols, rigorous training of personnel, and regular inspections are essential in minimizing the risks associated with laboratory work.

The importance of laboratory safety and biocontainment lies in protecting researchers, the environment, and the general public from potential harm. Adequate safety measures reduce the likelihood of accidental releases, minimize exposure to hazardous materials, and prevent the spread of synthetic viruses beyond the laboratory.

While many laboratories adhere to established safety protocols, instances of lapses leading to accidental releases have occurred in the past. Stricter implementation of safety standards, increased training for laboratory personnel, and regular inspections can help

mitigate this risk. Continuous improvement in safety protocols, sharing of best practices, and fostering a culture of safety and accountability within laboratories are crucial steps in preventing accidents and ensuring biosecurity.

5. International Cooperation and Information Sharing:

Enhancing international cooperation and information sharing is vital in combating the threat of bioterrorism. Biosecurity threats are not bound by borders, and effective response requires collaboration between nations, organizations, and researchers. Sharing information, expertise, and resources helps identify potential risks, develop effective countermeasures, and build trust among nations.

The importance of international cooperation and information sharing lies in its ability to facilitate early detection, rapid response, and effective containment of biosecurity threats. Collaborative efforts enable the identification of emerging technologies, sharing of best practices, and coordinated response planning. They also promote transparency, build trust, and reduce the likelihood of bioterrorism incidents.

Efforts have been made to enhance international cooperation through platforms such as the Biological Weapons Convention and other multilateral agreements. However, there is still a need for strengthening collaboration, ensuring equal participation of all countries, and removing barriers to information sharing. Increased investment in capacity building, technology transfer, and research collaboration can further strengthen global biosecurity efforts.

Questions to consider

1. What measures has your country taken to strengthen biosecurity and prevent the accidental or intentional release of synthetic viruses for bioterrorism?

2. How has your country addressed the issue of risk assessment and surveillance in relation to biosecurity?

3. What regulations and governance mechanisms are in place in your country to ensure the safe handling and containment of synthetic viruses?

4. How has your country approached the issue of dual-use research, which involves scientific research with both beneficial and potentially harmful applications?

5. How has your country actively participated in international cooperation and information sharing to strengthen global biosecurity efforts?

Past UN Actions

1. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004):

This resolution was adopted in response to concerns about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and their means of delivery. It established a legal framework requiring all UN member states to adopt and enforce measures to prevent the proliferation of WMDs, including biological weapons. The resolution calls upon states to enact and enforce legislation that criminalises the development, acquisition, and use of biological weapons. It also emphasises the importance of international cooperation and assistance in capacity-building to strengthen biosecurity.

2. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1972 (2011):

This resolution focused on the threat posed by the potential use of biological weapons by non-state actors, particularly terrorist groups. It called upon member states to enhance their national capabilities to prevent, detect, and respond to the use of biological weapons. The resolution emphasized the importance of robust national legislation, effective border controls, and information sharing among states. It also encouraged international cooperation and assistance to strengthen biosecurity measures at the global level.

3. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2325 (2016):

This resolution addressed the link between terrorism and the proliferation of WMDs, including biological weapons. It called upon member states to strengthen national and international efforts to prevent terrorists from accessing or using biological weapons. The resolution emphasized the importance of enhancing border security, strengthening

legislation, and promoting international cooperation to detect and prevent the movement of terrorists and illicit materials related to biological weapons.

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[Agenda 2]:

Responding to the increased deployment of PMCs in conflict zones

Vocabulary

1. International Humanitarian Law (IHL):

   A set of rules that aim to protect civilians and combatants who are no longer participating in hostilities during armed conflicts. PMCs operating in conflict zones should adhere to IHL, which includes principles such as distinction between civilians and combatants, proportionality, and respect for the principles of necessity and humanity.

2. Mercenaries:

   Individuals who are motivated by financial or personal gain to participate in armed conflicts on behalf of a party involved in the conflict. Mercenaries are often hired by PMCs to provide military services in conflict zones.

3. Private Military Companies (PMCs):

   Private companies that offer military and security-related services to governments, organizations, or individuals. PMCs often provide services such as armed security, logistics support, intelligence gathering, and training.

4. Rules of Engagement (ROE):

   Specific directives issued by military or government authorities outlining the circumstances and limitations under which military force, including that of PMCs, may be used.

5. International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (ICoC):

A set of standards and principles established to guide the behavior of private security companies, including PMCs, with a focus on human rights, transparency, and accountability.

6. Montreux Document:

   An international legal document that provides guidance on the legal obligations of states when contracting private military and security companies during armed conflicts.

7. Extraterritorial Jurisdiction:

   The legal authority of a country to apply its laws beyond its own borders, often relevant to prosecuting individuals involved in PMC activities abroad for crimes committed in conflict zones.

8. War Crimes:

   Violations of the laws and customs of war, including acts such as intentionally targeting civilians, torture, and other inhumane treatment. PMCs may be implicated in war crimes, and international law holds individuals accountable for such actions.

9. Due Diligence:

   The process of thoroughly assessing and managing risks associated with the activities of PMCs, including evaluating their reputation, compliance with laws and regulations, and adherence to ethical standards.

10. Geneva Conventions:

    A set of international treaties governing the conduct of armed conflicts and the protection of civilians and prisoners of war. Violations of these

conventions, even by non-state actors like PMCs, can lead to legal consequences.

11. UN Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries:

    A United Nations body that examines and monitors the use of mercenaries and PMCs, addressing related human rights issues and making recommendations to the international community.

12. Contractor on the Battlefield (COB) Doctrine:

    A military concept addressing the integration and management of private contractors, including PMCs, in a theater of operations, emphasizing coordination, accountability, and adherence to established rules.

13. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):

    The ethical framework and business practices adopted by PMCs to ensure they contribute positively to the communities and environments in which they operate, addressing concerns beyond legal compliance.

14. Conflict Minerals:

    Natural resources, often extracted in conflict zones, whose trade contributes to funding armed groups. PMCs may be involved in protecting or exploiting such resources, implicating them in issues related to conflict minerals.

15. Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights:

    A set of principles designed to guide extractive companies, including those employing PMCs, in maintaining the safety and security of their operations while respecting human rights.

Introduction of the Agenda

The presence and growing utilisation of Private Military Companies (PMCs) in conflict zones have become a significant global concern. PMCs, also known as private security companies, private military firms, or mercenaries, are non-state entities that provide military and security services to governments, international organisations, and private clients.

The increased deployment of PMCs in conflict zones raises numerous complex issues and challenges. While states have long relied on mercenaries throughout history, the modern proliferation of PMCs has brought forth new dynamics and concerns. PMCs often operate with limited oversight and accountability, blurring the lines between military and private actors. Their involvement can have profound implications for conflict dynamics, human rights, international law, and the principles of state sovereignty.

The increased deployment of PMCs in conflict zones has far-reaching implications on various aspects, including international security, state sovereignty, human rights, and accountability. PMCs are private entities that provide military and security services to states, non-state actors, and international organisations. While they offer certain advantages such as flexibility and specialised expertise, their involvement in conflict zones raises concerns regarding transparency, accountability, and the potential for human rights abuses. Therefore, it is crucial to address this issue to ensure the proper regulation and oversight of PMCs, as well as the protection of human rights in conflict-affected areas.

The utilisation of mercenaries and private military forces has deep historical roots. Throughout ancient history, leaders hired mercenaries to supplement their military forces, often due to resource constraints or specialised skills. However, the modern concept of PMCs emerged in the late 20th century, with notable events shaping their development.

One significant date in the history of PMCs is April 16, 1968, during the Nigerian Civil War. The Biafran government hired British-based PMC "Executive Outcomes" to provide military support. This marked one of the earliest instances where a PMC was employed in a modern conflict, showcasing the potential of private military forces in armed conflicts.

Another milestone occurred in 1995 when the United Nations established the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (ICoC). The ICoC aimed to address the lack of international regulations and standards for PMCs, emphasising respect for human rights, compliance with national and international law, and accountability. This initiative acknowledged the need for ethical conduct and responsible practices by PMCs.

The increased deployment of PMCs in conflict zones is a topic of great significance and concern. The history of PMCs can be traced back to the early 1990s, and the use of PMCs has increased significantly in recent years. There are concerns about the accountability, transparency, and impact of PMCs on human rights. Several international initiatives have been launched to regulate the use of PMCs, but there are still concerns about their use in conflict zones. It is important for the international community to continue to monitor and regulate the use of PMCs to ensure that they operate within the bounds of international law and respect human rights.

Background of the Agenda

The increased deployment of Private Military Companies (PMCs) in conflict zones is a topic of great significance and concern. PMCs are private companies that provide military services to governments, corporations, and other entities. They are often deployed in conflict zones to provide security, logistical support, and other services. The use of PMCs has increased significantly in recent years, and there are concerns about their accountability, transparency, and impact on human rights.

The history of PMCs can be traced back to the early 1990s, when the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War led to a significant reduction in the size of many national militaries. This created a gap in the market for private military services, which were quickly filled by companies such as Executive Outcomes and Sandline International. These companies provided military services to governments and other clients, often in conflict zones such as Angola and Sierra Leone.

One of the most significant events in the history of PMCs was the Iraq War, which began in 2003. The US government hired several PMCs, including Blackwater and Triple Canopy, to provide security and other services in Iraq. These companies were involved in several controversial incidents, including the Nisour Square massacre in 2007, in which 17 Iraqi civilians were killed by Blackwater contractors. The incident highlighted the lack of accountability and oversight of PMCs, and led to calls for greater regulation of the industry.

In response to these concerns, several international initiatives have been launched to regulate the use of PMCs. In 2008, the Montreux Document was adopted, which sets out guidelines for the use of PMCs in armed conflict. The document was endorsed by several countries, including the United States, and has been used as a basis for national legislation in several countries.

In addition to the Montreux Document, several other initiatives have been launched to regulate the use of PMCs. These include the International Code of Conduct for Private

Security Service Providers, which was launched in 2010, and the UN Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries, which was established in 2005.

Despite these initiatives, there are still concerns about the use of PMCs in conflict zones. Many critics argue that PMCs are not subject to the same level of accountability and oversight as national militaries, and that they can act with impunity in conflict zones. There are also concerns about the impact of PMCs on human rights, particularly in relation to the use of force and the treatment of detainees.

The Nigerian government hired Private Military Companies (PMCs) to help rescue the 276 schoolgirls kidnapped by the terrorist group Boko Haram in Nigeria in 2014. Unfortunately, the operation was unsuccessful 1. The incident drew widespread global attention, with several prominent personalities calling for their release. Most of the girls have been found or rescued by the army, or freed in negotiations between the government and Boko Haram

In addition to these incidents, there have been concerns about the impact of PMCs on human rights, particularly in relation to the use of force and the treatment of detainees. Critics argue that PMCs are not subject to the same level of accountability and oversight as national militaries, and that they can act with impunity in conflict zones.

Despite these concerns, the use of PMCs has continued to increase in recent years. It is important for the international community to continue to monitor and regulate the use of PMCs to ensure that they operate within the bounds of international law and respect human rights.

Key Stakeholders

1. ***United States:***

The United States has been one of the largest recruiters of Private Military Companies (PMCs) and has worked extensively with companies such as Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR), DynCorp International (DI), Fluor, and AECOM. The use of PMCs by the US government in Iraq and Afghanistan has been a subject of controversy, with several incidents highlighting the lack of accountability and oversight of PMCs.

The US government has also been involved in several controversial incidents involving PMCs. One of the most significant events in the history of PMCs was the Nisour Square massacre in 2007, in which 17 Iraqi civilians were killed by Blackwater contractors 3. The incident highlighted the lack of accountability and oversight of PMCs, and led to calls for greater regulation of the industry.

The U.S. response included changes in regulations and the imposition of legal consequences for PMC misconduct. the US government has launched several initiatives to regulate the use of PMCs, including the Montreux Document and the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers. The Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA) and the Defense Contract Audit Agency (DCAA) were tasked with increased oversight of PMC activities. However, questions remain about the effectiveness of these measures and the extent of the U.S. government's commitment to holding PMCs accountable.

2. ***Russia:***

Russia has a long-standing tradition of utilizing private military forces, with a history dating back to the Soviet era. The country has continued to employ PMCs as an instrument of power projection and influence in various conflict zones, raising concerns among the international community.

Russia has utilized PMCs extensively in recent conflicts, with the Wagner Group being a prominent example. Wagner's involvement in conflicts such as Syria and Ukraine has raised concerns about the Kremlin's influence and the lack of transparency surrounding these private military entities.

Russia utilizes PMCs to advance its geopolitical objectives by supporting friendly regimes or rebel groups. PMCs provide a means to exert influence and protect Russian interests in conflict-prone regions, ensuring strategic advantages. By deploying PMCs, Russia can engage in proxy warfare, indirectly supporting its allies without direct military involvement. This enables Russia to maintain plausible deniability and control over the narrative, while still achieving its objectives.

Russia's involvement in Ukraine highlights its utilisation of PMCs. During the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, Russian PMCs, such as the Wagner Group, played a significant role in supporting pro-Russian separatist forces. This raised concerns about human rights abuses and Russia's responsibility in the destabilisation of the region.

Russia's deployment of PMCs in Syria has been crucial in supporting the Assad regime and countering rebel groups. PMCs have provided combat support, protection of Russian military assets, and assistance in securing strategic objectives.

Russia has also been deploying PMCs in conflict zones, particularly in Syria and Ukraine. The use of PMCs by Russia has been criticised for lack of transparency and

accountability.. There are concerns that Russia’s use of PMCs in Syria is part of a broader strategy to expand its influence in the region.

Russia has taken steps to address the issue of PMC deployment by implementing legislative measures. The Russian Federation introduced a law in 2015 that regulates the activities of PMCs, emphasising the need for transparency, accountability, and compliance with international law.

The Russian government has been hesitant to acknowledge the activities of PMCs officially, maintaining a degree of deniability. This lack of transparency has complicated efforts to hold individuals and entities accountable for potential human rights violations. The international community continues to pressure Russia to increase transparency and accountability for the actions of PMCs operating in its interests.

3. China:

China's use of PMCs has grown in tandem with its expanding global influence. While the extent of China's involvement remains somewhat opaque, there have been reports of Chinese PMCs operating in Africa and the Middle East. China's use of PMCs aligns with its broader strategy to protect economic interests, secure resources, and maintain stability in regions critical to its Belt and Road Initiative.

China has a long history of engaging in global conflicts and has gradually increased its involvement in recent years. Historically, China has been cautious about direct military interventions, preferring a policy of non-interference. However, the rise of PMCs has provided an alternative means for China to exert influence and protect its interests in conflict zones.

China's increased reliance on foreign natural resources and strategic assets has driven its interest in utilizing PMCs. These companies can safeguard Chinese investments and

infrastructure projects in conflict-prone regions, ensuring stability and uninterrupted resource supply.

In 2010, Chinese PMCs first appeared in Africa to protect Chinese ships from Somali pirates Since then, China has been deploying PMCs in several African countries to protect its citizens and investments 1. In 2021, the Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi toured Central Asia and underlined Beijing's intention to provide the region with both "traditional" and "nontraditional" forms of security assistance 1.

China's involvement in Sudan serves as a notable example of its utilization of PMCs. During the Darfur conflict, China deployed PMCs to protect its oil investments and support the Sudanese government. This raised concerns regarding human rights abuses and China's responsibility in promoting stability.

China has also employed PMCs to safeguard its interests in the South China Sea. These companies have been involved in protecting Chinese vessels and asserting control over disputed territories, creating tensions with neighbouring countries and raising questions about China's adherence to international norms.

China has taken steps to address the issue of PMC deployment by implementing regulatory measures. In 2010, China issued guidelines on the use of security companies abroad, emphasizing the need for transparency, accountability, and adherence to international law.

The lack of transparency and accountability mechanisms in China's PMC operations raises concerns about potential human rights abuses and the impact on local populations. The international community is closely monitoring China's actions and advocating for increased transparency and adherence to international norms.

4. ***United Kingdom:***

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The United Kingdom has a long history of utilizing PMCs to support its military operations and security objectives. These contractors provide specialized services, including combat support, logistics, and training, augmenting the capabilities of the UK's armed forces.

The United Kingdom has connections with PMCs, with companies like Aegis Defence Services and G4S originating from the UK. In the aftermath of the Iraq War, the UK faced criticism for its reliance on PMCs and their conduct in conflict zones. The lack of clear regulations led to concerns about accountability and oversight

The UK employed PMCs during the civil war in Sierra Leone to support peacekeeping efforts and provide security for key infrastructure and personnel. This demonstrated the UK's commitment to promoting stability and protecting its interests in conflict-affected regions.

In 2018, it was reported that the UK government had deployed British security companies to at least five countries, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, and Somalia . The UK government has also been involved in several controversial incidents involving PMCs. One of the most significant events in the history of PMCs was the Nisour Square massacre in 2007, in which 17 Iraqi civilians were killed by Blackwater contractors 2. The incident highlighted the lack of accountability and oversight of PMCs, and led to calls for greater regulation of the industry.

In response to these concerns, the UK government has launched several initiatives to regulate the use of PMCs, including the Montreux Document and the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers This initiative aims to establish standards for responsible and accountable private security companies. The UK's evolving

approach reflects a commitment to address the issues associated with the deployment of PMCs and improve oversight mechanisms.

The UK has implemented a comprehensive regulatory framework to govern the activities of PMCs. The Private Security Industry Act 2001 and subsequent regulations ensure accountability, licensing, and oversight of PMCs operating within the UK.

5. ***South Africa:***

South Africa has a unique perspective on PMCs, given its historical context of apartheid and the use of private military forces during that era. Today, South Africa hosts several PMCs, and its citizens are actively involved in these operations globally. However, the country faces challenges in regulating the activities of its private military entities.

During the Angolan Civil War, South Africa employed PMCs to support its military operations. These PMCs played a significant role in providing combat support, training, and intelligence gathering.

South Africa's involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo included the deployment of PMCs to protect mining interests and provide security for key infrastructure projects.

South Africa has implemented legislation to regulate the activities of PMCs. The Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act (RFMAA) requires PMCs to obtain permits and adhere to certain conditions when operating abroad.

The South African government has taken steps to address these challenges by introducing legislation such as the Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act. This legislation aims to regulate South African citizens' involvement in foreign military activities and

enhance accountability for PMC actions. However, enforcing these regulations remains a complex task.

Key Issues

Accountability and Oversight:

One of the key issues tied to the increased deployment of PMCs in conflict zones is the need for accountability and oversight. Private military and security companies operate in complex and sensitive environments, often with limited transparency and oversight. This lack of accountability can lead to a range of problems, including human rights abuses, violations of international law, and impunity for misconduct.

To address this issue, various mechanisms have been established to ensure accountability and oversight of PMCs. These mechanisms include legal frameworks, contractual obligations, monitoring bodies, and reporting mechanisms. However, their effectiveness can vary.

One example of accountability and oversight is the Montreux Document. The Montreux Document, which was developed through a process of multilateral consultations, provides states with guidelines on how to ensure the legal and responsible conduct of PMCs. By endorsing the document, states commit to implementing measures such as vetting, training, and monitoring of PMCs. While the Montreux Document is a significant step towards holding PMCs accountable, its implementation and enforcement remain a challenge.

Another example is the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (ICoC). The ICoC is a voluntary initiative that sets out principles and standards for the responsible provision of private security services. Companies that sign and adhere to the ICoC commit to upholding human rights, complying with international law, and

establishing effective mechanisms for accountability. However, the effectiveness of the ICoC relies on the willingness of companies to voluntarily participate and adhere to its principles.

Additionally, some countries have implemented domestic legislation to regulate the activities of PMCs. For example, the United States has the Defense Base Act, which requires PMCs working for the U.S. government to provide workers' compensation and other benefits to their employees. This legislation helps ensure that PMCs operating in conflict zones are held accountable for their actions.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain in holding PMCs accountable. The lack of a unified international legal framework, the complex nature of conflicts, and the involvement of multiple stakeholders make effective oversight and accountability difficult. Additionally, the reliance on self-regulation and voluntary initiatives can limit the enforceability of standards.

To improve accountability and oversight, there is a need for stronger international cooperation, clearer legal frameworks, and robust monitoring mechanisms. States must actively enforce existing regulations and take steps to hold PMCs accountable for any misconduct. Moreover, civil society organizations and human rights groups play a crucial role in monitoring and advocating for transparency and accountability in the activities of PMCs.

Human Rights and Rule of Law:

The potential for human rights abuses and violations of the rule of law is a critical concern associated with PMCs. Their involvement in conflict zones raises questions about adherence to international humanitarian law and respect for human rights. The importance of this issue lies in the need to protect civilians and ensure that PMCs operate within the bounds of legality and ethics. While some incidents of human rights abuses involving PMCs have been addressed through legal channels, the effectiveness of these measures can vary depending on the jurisdiction and the willingness of states to hold PMCs accountable.

Human Rights and Rule of Law are essential considerations when responding to the increased deployment of PMCs in conflict zones. The presence of PMCs can have significant implications for the protection and respect of human rights, as well as the adherence to the rule of law.

One key issue is the potential for human rights abuses by PMCs. Instances of excessive use of force, torture, and violations of civilians' rights have been reported in several conflict zones. This highlights the importance of establishing clear guidelines and mechanisms to ensure that PMCs operate in accordance with international human rights standards.

Another issue is the lack of accountability for human rights violations committed by PMCs. Due to the complex nature of their operations and the involvement of multiple parties, holding PMC personnel accountable for their actions can be challenging. This can lead to a culture of impunity, where individuals responsible for human rights abuses go unpunished.

Examples of human rights abuses by PMCs can be seen in incidents such as the Nisour Square massacre in Iraq in 2007, where Blackwater contractors killed 17 civilians. This incident highlighted the need for accountability and proper regulation of PMCs.
To address these issues, various initiatives and mechanisms have been established. For example, the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (ICoC) sets out principles and standards for PMCs to respect human rights and international humanitarian law. The Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights is another framework that aims to guide companies in maintaining respect for human rights in conflict-affected areas.

However, the effectiveness of these initiatives remains a subject of debate. Some argue that voluntary standards are not enough and that binding legal mechanisms are necessary to ensure compliance. Additionally, the enforcement of these standards and the prosecution of human rights abuses by PMCs still face challenges.

Economic Interests and Neocolonialism:

The economic interests tied to the use of PMCs can raise concerns about neocolonialism and the exploitation of resources in conflict-affected regions. The involvement of PMCs in securing strategic assets and protecting investments can perpetuate unequal power dynamics and hinder local development. This issue is significant as it raises questions about the ethical implications of relying on private actors for security and the potential for economic exploitation.

It is a significant issue tied to the increased deployment of PMCs in conflict zones. PMCs often operate in regions rich in natural resources, such as oil, minerals, and precious metals. This raises concerns about the potential for economic exploitation and the perpetuation of neocolonial dynamics.

One example of this issue is the presence of PMCs in countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which is known for its mineral wealth. The involvement of

PMCs in securing mining operations can create a situation where foreign companies benefit disproportionately from the resources, often at the expense of local communities.

Another example is the case of private security companies operating in oil-rich regions, such as Nigeria. The presence of PMCs in these regions can lead to the protection of oil installations and infrastructure, ensuring the uninterrupted flow of resources to foreign markets. This dynamic can perpetuate economic inequality and hinder local development.

Efforts have been made to address these concerns through responsible business practices and sustainable development initiatives. For instance, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) promotes transparency and accountability in the extractive sector, aiming to prevent corruption and ensure fair distribution of revenues.

However, the effectiveness of these measures in mitigating neocolonial tendencies remains debatable. Critics argue that voluntary initiatives are insufficient and that stronger regulations and oversight are needed to address the economic interests tied to PMCs.

Questions to Consider

1. What are the key factors driving the increased deployment of PMCs in conflict zones?

2. What are the potential implications and consequences of the increased presence of PMCs in conflict zones, both for the security situation and for the local population?

3. What legal frameworks and regulations currently exist to govern the activities of PMCs in conflict zones, and how effective are they in ensuring accountability and protecting human rights?

4. What are some examples of past incidents or controversies involving PMCs in conflict zones, and what lessons can be learned from these experiences?

5. What are the possible measures that can be taken to address the challenges posed by the increased deployment of PMCs in conflict zones, such as enhancing transparency, strengthening regulation, and promoting responsible business practices?

Past UN Action

UNSC Resolution 1970 (2011)

It was a significant step taken by the United Nations Security Council to address the issue of mercenaries and their impact on global security. The resolution expressed concern over the use of mercenaries and called upon states to prevent their recruitment and use. It emphasized the need for states to enact legislation and adopt measures to criminalize the recruitment, financing, and training of mercenaries.

The resolution aimed to curb the activities of private military and security companies (PMSCs) that operate outside the framework of state control and accountability. By urging states to prevent the recruitment and use of mercenaries, Resolution 1970 sought to promote stability, respect for human rights, and the rule of law in conflict-affected regions.

UNSC Resolution 2178 (2014)

Was built upon the previous efforts in countering global security threats by focusing on the flow of foreign terrorist fighters. It recognized the role of PMCs in facilitating the activities of these fighters and called upon states to take measures to prevent and suppress their movements.

Resolution 2178 urged states to criminalise the recruitment, organising, and financing of individuals travelling to join terrorist groups. It stressed the importance of international cooperation in sharing information, intelligence, and best practices to disrupt the flow of foreign terrorist fighters.

The Montreux Document

It was adopted in 2008, It is a political declaration. It was developed through a collaborative effort between states, international organizations, and civil society. The document provides guidelines for states to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and human rights when hiring PMCs.

The Montreux Document emphasizes the importance of conducting due diligence in selecting and contracting PMCs, ensuring that they operate within the boundaries of international law, and holding them accountable for any misconduct. It also highlights the responsibilities of states in providing effective oversight and regulation of PMC activities.

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