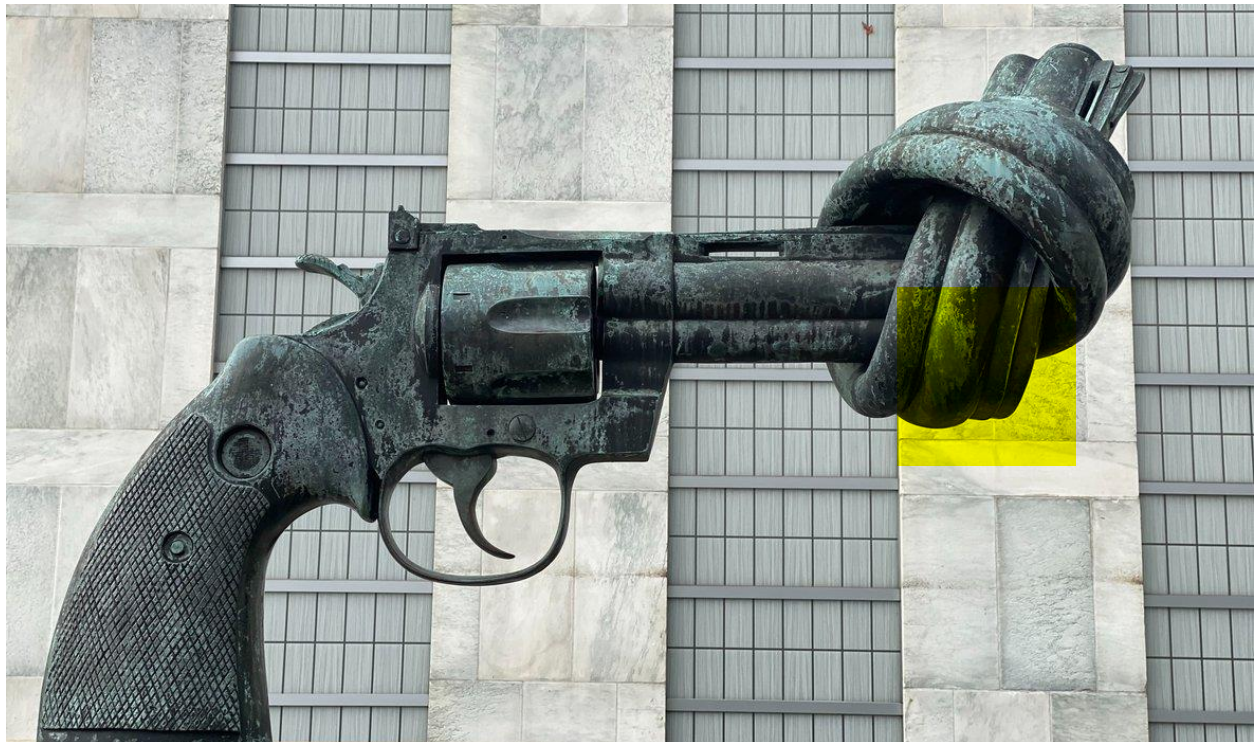


Background Guide for
VicMUN 2025: General Assembly First Committee
The Relationship between Disarmament and Development



General Assembly Overview

Introduction:

The General Assembly (GA), established with the founding of the United Nations Organisation (UN or UNO) in 1945, is one of six principal organs of the UN.¹ Comprising all UN member-states, it is the key policy-making organ of the UN and provides a forum for multilateral discussion of all international issues covered by the United Nations Charter. These issues can include disarmament, development, human rights, international law, and arbitration of disputes. While the GA makes important decisions, such as appointing the UN Secretary-General (on the recommendation of the Security Council) and approving the UN budget, it is generally not an action body. Resolutions in the GA are still significant, however, as they indicate the positions of member-states, outline organising principles, and propose initiatives for member-states to undertake.² The GA has many subsidiary organs, including commissions, councils, and committees.³ There are six main committees, but the one you will be participating in is the First Committee, dedicated to Disarmament and International Security. The First Committee deals with disarmament and challenges and threats to peace while also seeking solutions to challenges in international security. It considers all disarmament and security issues within the scope of the United Nations Charter or relating to the powers and functions of other UN organs and “works in close cooperation with the [United Nations Disarmament Commission](#) and the Geneva-based [Conference on Disarmament](#).”⁴

Mandate, Functions, and Powers:

As outlined by the United Nations Charter, the GA’s chief functions are to discuss, debate, and make recommendations within the scope of the charter, from which it gets its mandate. The GA’s mandate allows it to make recommendations to UN and international actors, initiate studies, and advance efforts to promote international cooperation, consider or request reports from UN and specialised agencies, and create expert groups or commissions.⁵ The GA *typically* does not dictate specific actions for recommended policy implementation or create new organs.

¹ Model United Nations, “History of the United Nations,” *UN.org*. <<https://www.un.org/en/model-united-nations/history-united-nations> (n.d.)>; United Nations Organisation, *United Nations Charter*, (San Francisco, 1945).

² United Nations Organisation, “Workings of the General Assembly,” *General Assembly of the United Nations*. <<https://www.un.org/en/ga/> (n.d.)>; Editors for the Council on Foreign Relations, “What Is the UN General Assembly?” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 19 September 2024. <<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/un-general-assembly-unga-role>>

³ United Nations Organisation, “Subsidiary organs of the General Assembly,” *General Assembly of the United Nations*. <<https://www.un.org/en/ga/about/subsidiary/index.shtml> (n.d.)>

⁴ United Nations Organisation, “Disarmament and International Security (First Committee),” *General Assembly of the United Nations*. <<https://www.un.org/en/ga/first/index.shtml> (n.d.)>

⁵ *United Nations Charter*, (San Francisco, 1945); Nicole Ruder, Kenji Nakano, and Johann Aeschlimann, *The GA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, edited by Johann Aeschlimann and Mary Regan, (New York City: Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations, 2011), 36.

As mentioned above, the GA is not an operative organ, and its recommendations are non-binding. The GA can also consider and approve the UN budget, discuss, and make recommendations on issues regarding the powers of other UN organs, initiate studies, and establish subsidiary organs “as it deems necessary for the performance of its functions,” although the latter often takes years of debate.⁶

Governance and Structure:

As mentioned above, the GA comprises all 193 UN member-states, each of which has one vote.⁷ The GA adopts resolutions, which are documents that express agreement in the international community. These resolutions are often adopted *by consensus*, meaning that no member-state has reason to object and no vote is taken. Roughly half of the First Committee’s resolutions are adopted by consensus.⁸ When voting does take place, those on important issues require a two-thirds majority, and other questions are decided by a simple majority (51%).⁹ The GA is largely self-governing, deciding on its own agendas, procedures, officers, and subsidiary bodies.¹⁰

The First Committee’s Secretariat and an elected Bureau manage its procedures.¹¹ The Bureau assists with opening and closing meetings, managing discussions, pronouncing decisions, assisting with drafts and documents, and ensuring compliance with the rules of procedure.¹² The Secretariat provides substantive and logistical support.¹³ Substantive and organisational support also comes from the General Committee, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.¹⁴

⁶ Dag Hammarskjöld Library, “Are UN resolutions binding?” *UN.org*. <<https://ask.un.org/faq/15010> (5 January 2024)>; United Nations Human Rights Council, “Welcome to the Human Rights Council,” *UNHCR.org*. <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/about-council> (n.d.)>; *United Nations Charter*, (San Francisco, 1945); “What Is the UN General Assembly?” *Council on Foreign Relations*; United Nations Organisation, “Functions and powers of the General Assembly,” *General Assembly of the United Nations*, <<https://www.un.org/en/ga/about/background.shtml> (n.d.)>

⁷ United Nations Organisation, “Functions and powers of the General Assembly.”

⁸ Ruder, Nakano, and Aeschlimann, *The GA Handbook*, 37, 52, 68-70.

⁹ United Nations Organisation, “Functions and powers of the General Assembly.”

¹⁰ Ruder, Nakano, and Aeschlimann, *The GA Handbook*, 13, 15, 44.

¹¹ Ruder, Nakano, and Aeschlimann, *The GA Handbook*, 18, 68.

¹² United Nations Organisation, *Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly (A/520/Rev.19)*, (New York City, 2022), 30-31.

¹³ Ruder, Nakano, and Aeschlimann, *The GA Handbook*, 69, 71.

¹⁴ United Nations Organisation, “Disarmament and International Security (First Committee).”

Funding:

The GA is funded through the UN's regular budget.¹⁵ In 2019, this amounted to 56.9 billion USD, much of which comes from the governments of member-states, with the United States of America as the largest contributor. The UN is also funded by multilateral organisations (e.g., the European Union), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the private sector.¹⁶

Current Guides:

In September 2015, all UN member states signed on to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a “universal framework for action to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and protect our planet.” It calls for a model of sustainable economic progress that is socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable. According to the [United Nations Sustainable Development Group](#) (UNSDG), it should support investment in higher value-added products and sectors, technology, a diversified economy, and greater productivity, which should generate a higher quality of life. The UNSDG goes on to state that “only then can countries meet the most pressing needs of their societies, including the eradication of extreme poverty.” By emphasising universal development, the agenda steps back from global averages and moves towards identifying and closing gaps in the particular contexts of different countries. Considering the agenda's focus on inclusive and peaceful societies, it “could significantly advance conflict prevention.” According to the UNSDG, achieving the agenda's goals will mitigate many factors that enhance the risk of conflict, such as pervasive exclusion, weak state capacity, and the multifaceted impacts of climate change. The agenda recognises the connections between conflict, violence, terrorism, and sustainable development.¹⁷ Deriving from this recognition, it also asserts the “need to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice and that are based on respect for human rights (including the right to development), on effective rule of law and good governance at all levels and on transparent, effective and accountable institutions” (see *Disarmament and Development* for more information).¹⁸

¹⁵ *United Nations Handbook 2023-2024*, (Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade/Manatū Aorere, 2022), 412.

¹⁶ UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office, “How is the United Nations Funded?” [mptf.undp.org](https://mptf.undp.org/page/how-united-nations-funded).
<<https://mptf.undp.org/page/how-united-nations-funded> (n.d.)>

¹⁷ Government of Canada, “The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” [Canada.ca](https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_developpement-enjeux_developpement/priorites-priorites/agenda-programme.aspx?lang=eng).
<https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_developpement-enjeux_developpement/priorites-priorites/agenda-programme.aspx?lang=eng (14 June 2024)>; United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *Foundational Primer on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, (New York City, 2019): 7-8.

¹⁸ United Nations Organisation, *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, (New York City, 2015).

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<<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/about-council> (n.d.)>

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<<https://mptf.undp.org/page/how-united-nations-funded> (n.d.)>

Disarmament and Development

Introduction:

As discussed in *Current Guides*, the UN has recognised the links between disarmament and development. It not only understands that conflict, violence, and terrorism limit development, but that developing and strengthening economies, societies, and governing institutions can mitigate the threat of armed violence. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UN also recognises that countries in conflict and post-conflict situations – especially those in Africa – need special attention when discussing sustainable development. Indeed, Goal 16 of the agenda is to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels,” including combating terrorism and reducing “all forms of violence.”¹⁹

Over time, disarmament decreases military spending, freeing financial resources for development and often improving stability. The relationship between disarmament and development refers to a recognition of this reality. Resources spent on the production, maintenance, and use of armaments and weapons systems could be used to develop infrastructure and access to social services or to increase welfare and living conditions.²⁰ The relationship can also go in the reverse. Developing social, economic, and governance institutions can reduce what are seen as the main drivers of violence and conflict – and in turn, militarisation – such as political and economic inequality and instability.²¹

Global Trends:

Since the end of the Cold War in the years 1989-1991, there has been a decrease in military spending globally. Many expected this to result in a peace dividend and more resources for developmental purposes. This has appeared to occur in some countries, with released resources fostering development via research, investment, lower interest rates, and economic growth. However, the results of the peace dividend were not systematically or directly applied to the poorest countries, nor was it realised the same way in different countries.²² The trend in global

¹⁹ United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *Foundational Primer on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, (New York City, 2019): 7-8; United Nations Organisation, *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, (New York City, 2015).

²⁰ United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs, *Study Series 31: The relationship between disarmament and development in the current international context*, (New York City, 2004).

²¹ United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *Foundational Primer on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 7-8; Laurie Nathan, “‘The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse’: The Structural Causes of Crisis and Violence in Africa,” In *Demilitarisation and Peace-Building in Southern Africa*, ed. Kees Kingma, (London: Routledge, 2004): 189.

²² United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs, *Study Series 31*.

military spending has also reversed in recent years, with it reaching a high of 2.24 trillion USD in 2022.²³

Poor countries tend to face the brunt of arms proliferation and violent conflict, which are the largest impediments to their development.²⁴ These have not only affected poor countries through their direct consequences, but also by creating massive waves of refugees and displaced persons, governance issues, illegal exploitation of conflict goods and natural resources, and illicit trafficking of narcotics and weapons.²⁵ Increases in violence, persecution, and human rights violations have caused a 75% rise in the number of displaced persons from 1993 to 2017, from 37.3 million to a high of 68.5 million. Additionally, the World Bank estimates that by 2030, between 50% and 80% of the world's poor will reside in conflict-affected areas.²⁶ Furthermore, fewer than 1/7 people globally feel secure or relatively secure, and over 50% feel a high level of insecurity.²⁷

The world's richest populations continue to possess a disproportionate amount of wealth, and little has been done to shift resources from arms to developmental projects. Indeed, many of the world's top arms producers reside in the Global North, such as the United States of America, the Russian Federation, the French Republic, the People's Republic of China, and the Federal Republic of Germany.²⁸

In their article "Emerging trends in peacebuilding: The case of Colombia," Siniša Vuković, Giovanna Maria Dora Dore, and Guadalupe Paz use Colombia as a case study for emerging trends in peacebuilding. They show that peacebuilding, especially in Colombia's case, has begun to expand into areas previously considered less relevant to its objectives. These areas include social inclusion of vulnerable and marginalised groups, agricultural and structural reform, and judicial reform.²⁹ The Colombian case shows that the recognition between disarmament and development is beginning to have an observable impact in conflict zones and that the approach taken to conflict resolution is shifting to a focus on social, economic, and institutional development.

There have also been a few new and growing challenges that relate to disarmament and development. These include the climate crisis, the changing nature of conflict with new

²³ United Nations Organisation, *Relationship between disarmament and development: Report of the Secretary-General (A/78/128)*, (New York City, 2023): 4.

²⁴ United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *Foundational Primer on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 12.

²⁵ United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs, *Study Series 31*.

²⁶ United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *Foundational Primer on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 12, 22.

²⁷ Jody Williams, "Weapons, War and Military Spending: Disarmament Is Fundamental for Human Security and Sustainable Development," In *Global Governance and International Cooperation*, ed. Richard Falk and Augusto Lopez-Claros, (London: Routledge, 2024): 92.

²⁸ Williams, "Weapons, War and Military Spending," 90, 94.

²⁹ Siniša Vuković, Giovanna Maria Dora Dore and Guadalupe Paz, "Emerging trends in peacebuilding: The case of Colombia," *Global Policy* 15 (June 2024): 5-6.

technologies (e.g., lethal autonomous weapons systems, or LAWS), the eroding respect for international norms and institutions, and the growing influence of non-state actors.³⁰

What has been done?:

Beyond statements of recognition, there have been mixed results in acting on the UN's 2030 goals for sustainable development in relation to disarmament. As mentioned above, the recognition of the links between disarmament and development is beginning to manifest in real-world peacebuilding scenarios. Besides this, the UN has established a trust facility through the Peacebuilding Fund dedicated to strengthening the institutional capacity of states, and the [United Nations Development Programme](#) (UNDP) has established “programmes that offer either communities or individuals development incentives in exchange for weapons.”³¹ The [United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs](#) (UNODA) also collects data on the “proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms” with illicit origins and supports “concrete small arms control initiatives that foster sustainable development,” including the [United Nations Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation](#) (UNSCAR) and the [Saving Lives Entity](#) (SALIENT).³² In 2013, the Arms Trade Treaty was signed as well, increasing regulations affecting the trade of armaments.³³ Also, since the 1987 International Conference on the Relationship Between Disarmament and Development, new and existing mechanisms have been established and strengthened, and the Secretary-General has created an interdepartmental task force to incorporate a “disarmament development perspective in the activities of the United Nations system.”³⁴

Article 26 of the United Nations Charter calls for the “establishment of a system for the regulation of armaments.”³⁵ Discussing this article, Jody Williams writes that Security Council members have ignored it and engaged in “weapons profiteering and arms races.” It is this profiteering and competition that she argues to be the reason that no arms regulation system has been established. To date, the international community has not been able to agree on limiting military expenditure or creating a guiding ratio of military spending to national development expenditure. Despite the lack of initiative in international disarmament efforts and the heightened tensions deriving from the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict, there has continued to be progress. In 2022 and 2023, government, civil society, and international institutions worked together to bring changes and make disarmament work. The fruits of their labour include the Treaty on the

³⁰ Cécile Aptel, “Current Issues in Disarmament and Arms control,” Presentation at IALL 2023, Geneva Graduate Institute, 11 October 2023.

³¹ Izumi Nakamitsu, “Advancing Disarmament within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” *UN Chronicle* 2 (2018): 18; United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs, *Study Series* 31.

³² United Nations Organisation, “Disarmament and Sustainable Development,” *United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs*, <<https://disarmament.unoda.org/sustainable-development/>> (n.d.)>

³³ United Nations Organisation, “Arms Trade,” *United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs*, <<https://disarmament.unoda.org/convarms/att/>> (n.d.)>

³⁴ United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs, *Study Series* 31.

³⁵ United Nations Organisation, United Nations Charter, (San Francisco, 1945).

Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the Political Declaration of the Protection of Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, and the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots.³⁶

Topics of Interest (or, Research Questions):

There have long been debates at the UN over issues of self-determination and the Global North's interference in and predominance over the Global South.³⁷ The topic of disarmament and development is one area where this debate comes to prominence. In a letter to the Secretary-General of the UN, the Cuban delegation wrote that "an unjust and undemocratic international order is the cause of the inequalities and exclusion faced today by the vast majority of people," suggesting that intervention in the Global South is part of the problem. In contrast to this, and in another letter to the Secretary-General, the European Union advocated for "effective multilateralism" and "enhancing close cooperation." In the same letter, the European Union also wrote that it "undertakes targeted diplomatic outreach on disarmament and non-proliferation, inter alia, to *persuade* third countries to accede to important arms control agreements" (emphasis added).³⁸ The current national security framework, originating from the Treaties of Westphalia that ended the 30 Years War in 1648, emphasises a state's right to self-determination, occasionally putting this before the upholding of human rights and freedoms. The Westphalian System also bestows the role of guarantor of security to nation-states, which some have called into question. Additionally, as technology gets more sophisticated, others have argued that disarmament requires technical expertise, which tends to be in the hands of states, especially richer ones. As guarantors of national security, many states believe that possessing armaments is necessary for their national security and sovereignty.³⁹ Indeed, the UN has recognised conceivable "circumstances in which disarmament could further reduce a weak State's ability to defend itself and its people against internal or external aggression."⁴⁰ The theme of national self-determination and the Global North's involvement in disarmament brings up several questions: What exactly is the role of richer, northern nations in disarmament and development? Who gets to make the decisions? Should it be those with more resources, expertise, and greater respect for human rights? If the North gets to make decisions, why? especially considering its historical role in establishing the "failing" systems and occasional destabilising interventions in the Global South.⁴¹ To what extent is the possession of armaments a national (or even individual) right? And to what extent may it *deter* violent conflict or be used to resist oppression and intervention?

Disarmament and development also relate to the arms industry, trade, and economics more generally. Many states make a significant amount of money from the arms trade, and bringing an

³⁶ Williams, "Weapons, War and Military Spending," 91, 97-100.

³⁷ Rita Knudsen, *The Fight Over Freedom in 20th- and 21st-Century International Discourse: Moments of 'self-determination,'* (New York City: Springer International Publishing, 2020): 133-136; Stanley Meisler, *United Nations: A History*, (New York City: Grove Press, 2011): 355-361.

³⁸ United Nations Organisation, *Relationship between disarmament and development*, 10, 15.

³⁹ Williams, "Weapons, War and Military Spending," 89, 93.

⁴⁰ United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs, *Study Series 31*.

⁴¹ Nathan, "'The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,'" 197.

abrupt end to this may hamper their economic growth.⁴² It is not only the Global North that benefits from producing and exporting arms. Some countries in the Global South, such as the Arab Republic of Egypt, have significant arms industries too.⁴³ Those who are subject to or fear foreign intervention, such as Ukraine, may also be reluctant to decrease spending on the arms industry. Lastly, the UN has acknowledged that the “high financial costs of disarmament appear to negatively affect short-term prospects for development.”⁴⁴ The questions to consider in relation to the arms industry and trade are: To what extent may profit from the arms trade assist economic development? Will certain countries want to give up access to the lucrative arms trade? To what extent does the arms trade contribute to global inequalities?

On a related note, it is important to ensure that disarmament and demilitarisation do not lead to resource scarcity and inequality. Reducing military expenditure does not necessarily mean that additional resources *will* be used for development. Those undertaking the demilitarisation must actively make the decision and have the capacity to effectively distribute and reallocate resources to development without creating inequalities between regions or social groups. The sections of the arms industry that do get demilitarised must also be reoriented toward civilian production. Finally, soldiers who are dismissed often find themselves without a source of support, income, or livelihood; efforts must be made to ensure that no one is left behind.⁴⁵ With disarmament and development’s relation to the economy, consider these questions: How can we ensure that resources formerly used for defence will instead be used for development? What measures can be enacted to prevent industrial decay or collapse following disarmament? What programs can be put in place to ensure that development is inclusive of all peoples and regions?

Issues With Policy and Resolution Making:

The UNSDG has stated that one of the key issues in determining policy is the lack of quality information and data regarding development and disarmament progress, especially in poorer countries. It has called for better systems and technology for data collection but recognises that there is a gap between what is “feasible from the point of view of technology and the current statistical capacities of many countries.”⁴⁶ Another issue with disarmament and development treaties, and policies more generally, is that they often do not include representation from poorer countries, those affected by the proliferation of armaments, or marginalised groups.⁴⁷ Disarming

⁴² Williams, “Weapons, War and Military Spending,” 94; Jordi Calvo Rufanges, “No business without enemies: War and the arms trade,” *tmi Longreads*, <<https://longreads.tmi.org/stateofpower/no-business-without-enemies-war-and-the-arms-trade>> (May 2021)>

⁴³ “Egypt needs export customers for its growing defence industry,” *Military Africa*, 4 November 2022. <https://www.military.africa/2022/11/egypt-needs-export-customers-for-its-growing-defence-industry/#google_vignette>

⁴⁴ United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs, *Study Series 31*.

⁴⁵ United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs, *Study Series 31*.

⁴⁶ United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *Foundational Primer on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 37-38

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Minor, “Disarmament, development and patterns of marginalisation in international forums,” *Article36* (April 2016): 1.

also requires technical sophistication, significant financial resources, and political will, which some states do not possess, and some states face little to no consequences for not fully complying with disarmament provisions.⁴⁸ The most major issue in policy and resolution making, however, is that of national self-determination and the necessity of arms in ensuring this.⁴⁹ Initiatives for disarmament have often been resisted because of this, and it is unlikely to go anywhere in the near future.

⁴⁸ Bonnie Docherty and Lan Mei, “Money Matters: Ensuring Financial Assistance Advances Humanitarian Disarmament,” *Humanitarian Disarmament*, 5 August 2019.

<<https://humanitariandisarmament.org/2019/08/05/money-matters-ensuring-financial-assistance-advances-humanitarian-disarmament/>>; Nuclear Threat Initiative, “Module 4: Current Issues and Challenges,” *Non-Proliferation Treaty*. <<https://tutorials.nti.org/npt-tutorial/current-issues-and-challenges/> (n.d.)>

⁴⁹ Williams, “Weapons, War and Military Spending,” 89-91.

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Good Luck!