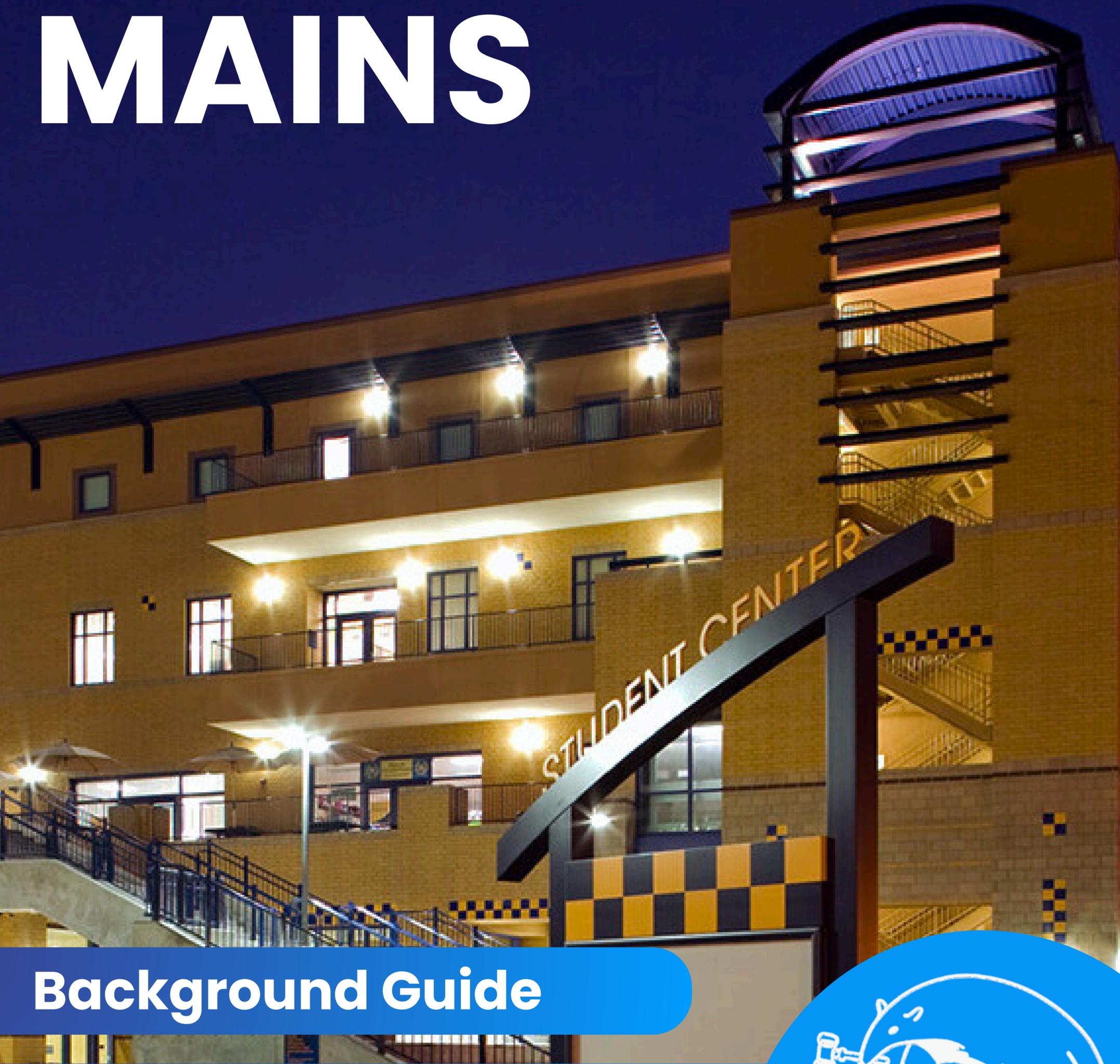


UCIMUN 2026 MAINS



Background Guide

SPECPOL

Dylan Gurram



A letter from the chair

Dear Delegates,

It is a great honor to be able to introduce you all to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL) at UCIMUN this year! For a brief introduction, my name is Dylan Gurrām, and this will be my fifth year doing Model United Nations. I am incredibly excited to be sharing this experience with all of you! This year, I will be serving as your director alongside my two other assistant directors, Joseph Tun & Krish Grover. Together, we have worked to build this committee, and we are confident it will be a thoughtful experience for all delegates. This applies regardless of your prior Model UN experience. As a team, we cannot wait to hear the unique and interesting solutions you will all bring to the table!

Here at UCI, I specialize in Political Science and am slowly working my way towards entering the legal field. I'm very confident that many of you may share similar interests, so please feel free to reach out to me, whether via email or even in person, for reading advice about Model UN, college, or any other shared interest. On that note, in my free time, I love to snowboard, do tricks, and spend my time cooking! In addition to this, you can often find me doing activities such as rock climbing/bouldering or hyper-realistic art! On Campus, I stay involved in several political and humanitarian organizations that focus on addressing critical global issues. A cool, fun fact about me is that I'm unfortunately not a California native; I'm actually from New Jersey, so shout out to the East Coast.

Furthermore, I'm honored to announce this year's topics: A Deep Sea Oceanic Submersible Warfare in the Arctic and Chinese Sea, and topic B: the Rise of Gang Warfare and Cartel Activities in Northern South America. These topics are deeply connected to SPECPOL'S & UCI's mission towards fostering global peace and forming a stronger community. We urge all delegates to keep this in mind when solving these overarching issues.

As a general reminder to all delegates, please use this guide as a foundation for your research. We strongly advise you all to diligently research this topic using additional sources to better enhance your knowledge and fundamental understanding of this topic. Here at UCI Delegates are evaluated not only on their preparation but also on their willingness to learn and collaborate with others. Again, do not hesitate and feel free to reach out to us with any questions you have regarding Model UN. Best of luck, future delegates.

Best regards,

Dylan Gurrām

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TOPIC A: Deep Sea Oceanic Submersible Warfare (Arctic & South China Sea)

Introduction

For centuries, naval warfare has been a method used by many countries to help secure their borders, oceans, and land. From the dawn of ancient empires to modern-day countries, control of the seas has shaped how nations trade, expand, and survive. However, recently, naval warfare has surged in its influence upon the global sphere. Nations have utilized their geological advantage to create new methods of physical and technological warfare, ranging from surveillance systems to methods of nuclear destruction. Due to this impending rise of power, it is imperative that this committee addresses the issue of rising naval tensions and focuses on peaceful solutions towards mitigating them.

Historically, naval tools have been used for centuries, such as ships used for trade and even battle; this power determined the rise and fall of thousands of civilizations. In the 20th century, naval warfare evolved rapidly as the creation of submarines, aircraft carriers, destroyers, and long-range missiles took to the seas. These tools, while useful for their means of defense, also pose an impending sense of danger to the world. Countries often battle for naval dominance as it serves as a strategic tool for positioning and nuclear defense.

In the modern era, naval warfare has become increasingly complex. Disputes over maritime waters and vantage points have helped intensify tensions between naval powers. This, partnered with new advances in technology such as autonomous naval systems, cyber warfare, and underwater surveillance have made naval conflict more covert. Causing faster-moving and potentially more dangerous wars in the future. As a committee, it is your job to address these rising tensions and create solutions to help mitigate the situation at hand.

Description of the Topic

The current state of modern-day oceanic and naval warfare

Over centuries, naval warfare has inevitably shifted from the visible surface of the ocean to some of the deepest and most isolated regions. Due to the new advancements in naval submersible technology and underwater surveillance systems, the oceans have been transformed into a playground for war. Deep-sea warfare is often done without the public's acknowledgement and often lacks imperative rules and regulations. This often leads to dangerous and life-threatening situations. As a result, it's clear to all that deep-sea warfare poses an imminent threat to all countries regardless of their connection to the oceans. For these reasons, the United Nations must come together to help address these issues at hand.

New naval sea routes due to polar ice caps melting

Within this topic, however lies many overarching issues, one of them being environmental change. Rising global temperatures near the Arctic regions have led to a reduction in polar ice coverage. This has inevitably created new openings; previously inaccessible waters and naval routes are now open to other countries' agendas. Specifically, in the Arctic, newly navigable routes have intensified military interest underneath the ice. Many States have responded to this newfound opportunity by deploying submarines to assert presence, secure resources, and monitor rivaling activity. This expanding access has allowed certain countries like Russia, the United States of America, Canada, Norway, China, and others to extend their reach far beyond historical limits. Due to this, it increases the chance of overlapping patrol zones and leads to an increase in the likelihood of underwater tensions between rivaling countries.

Artificial islands in the South China Sea

In parallel to this, conflicts have begun to unfold in some of the world's most contested oceanic spaces. Specifically, in areas like the South China Sea, underwater competition has become synonymous with broader territorial disputes. This has led to countries like China to construct artificial islands in the South China Sea. These man-made islands enabled the expansion of naval infrastructure capable of supporting submarine operations, long-term surveillance, and rapid force projection. Beneath the surface of these islands, submarines consistently monitor and patrol the region. While sensor networks simultaneously operate alongside them. These autonomous underwater systems have the power to transform the region into a complex web of naval warfare. Delegates should address these issues and question the legitimacy of these artificial islands. Should other countries have the right to build these systems of naval warfare, or should they be disbanded altogether?

New technological advancements in naval warfare.

Additionally, delegates should focus on the widening technological advancement that further allowed a shift towards military competition between countries. States have been increasingly investing in new forms of naval technology like underwater drones, mine detection systems, and undetectable torpedo systems that possess the ability to sink entire submersibles. These systems help reduce the need for human crews and can lower political risk. However, there is always a negative; autonomy also introduces new dangers. This could lead to a new increase in warfare as human lives are no longer on the line, and could catalyze conflicts in oceans. Eventually, as more states acquire these technological advancements, the potential for undersea confrontation continues to rise.

Conflicts and tensions rising tied to global rivalries

Naval Warfare is not limited to the entire deep sea; regional rivalries have also expanded into local sea ports and aquatic domains. This has reshaped strategic tactics used by a magnitude of countries far beyond the means of traditional naval plans. In particular, the Indian Ocean, submarine deployments near strategic maritime chokepoints have symbolized a growing competition over important Indian trade routes. In parallel to this, China's expanding undersea presence has affected nearby Sri Lanka. This helps illustrate to delegates how submarines can be used as a tool not only for defense, but also for signaling power and shaping regional alignments. Simultaneously, we have seen a growth in Iran's investment in fast-attack submarines and underwater drones. This has raised concerns about the security of major oil routes that are imperative to the global supply chain. Situations like this should help demonstrate the butterfly effect that naval combatants have. It doesn't merely just affect the domestic security of one's country, but it can also work to cripple their economies and trade opportunities.

Environmental impact caused by an increase in naval warfare

Often, the issue of environmental impact is overlooked when addressing naval technologies. These significant environmental consequences can extend beyond just security concerns. Due to the rise of military activity at sea, countries have been testing submarine operations, sonar use, and live-fire exercises. These can all work together to help severely disrupt marine ecosystems. The issue with sonar systems is due to the powerful sounds they emanate for hundreds of kilometers. This leads to disorientation and mass stranding for whales and dolphins. In parallel to this, underwater explosions and weapons testing can cause damage to coral reefs and seabed habitats. Oil spills, shrapnel, and the sinking of vessels further contaminate marine environments. It is imperative to address these issues, as regions that are already affected by climate change have very weak habitats that cannot withstand additional disturbances.

Altogether, these disturbances and global issues should help paint a picture of this committee for all delegates. We urge individuals to focus on the issues that are addressed in the background guide, but we simultaneously welcome new and innovative ideas that can help tackle the issues that have been plaguing our globe.

Bloc positions Topic A

Naval warfare affects each country independently, ranging from concerns over environmental impacts, security, and economic trade. However, the order of these issues is up to each of you delegates. These differing perspectives and priorities help shape how the United Nations views the overarching idea of Naval warfare. Throughout the course of this committee, countries will join forces to create solutions that help benefit their shared specific interests. These differing interests may be even specifically unique to your own country's stances. However, we encourage all of you to stay true to your country's real-world stance on the issue.

Major naval powers often focus on the importance of national security and often use the seas as a strategic tool for their militaries. Many of these nations will prioritize the security and safety of their naval tools and weapons. This includes weapons such as submarines, aircraft carriers, and other forms of reconnaissance. Delegates of these nations are encouraged to focus on their nation's security and use the committee as a strategic platform to protect their freedom of navigation. However, the choice is ultimately up to them on whether to further the usage of destructive naval tools.

Whereas, developing and newly transitioning Coastal States often face a more unique challenge. They lack the resources needed to patrol or defend their maritime zones effectively. This inevitably causes states to focus on issues that are more concerning for them. As a result of this, these countries often tend to favor international cooperation and peacemaking opportunities. However, they should also remain cautious of newly developing naval routes that can be used to undermine their sovereignty and entangle them in future conflicts.

Committee goals towards addressing naval warfare

The goal of this committee is to tackle the issue of naval warfare through the lens of each delegation's national self-interest. While ultimately it is to collaborate with other delegates to address the issues of naval warfare and find a balance as nations between security and the protection of one's sovereignty. By the end of this committee, delegates should develop a deeper understanding of why countries utilize naval submarines in the first place, and why they utilize other technologies to engage in deep-sea militant combat.

Delegates are also expected as a committee to address the environmental aspect that accompanies this conflict. Often, deep-sea warfare can pose threats to marine life alongside the destruction of important glacier structures. Delegates should work together to craft technological and social solutions that help focus on not only preventing further conflict but also addressing the biological impact of warfare. Considering that this conflict is of dire urgency, it will require nuanced research regarding the topic, paired alongside continuous debate amongst other

delegates to resolve it. A successful committee will require thorough research, nuanced debate, and policy-based solutions to prevent escalation while mitigating environmental harm.

Questions to consider

1. Delegates should ask questions regarding countries infringing on others' sovereignty through the naval passages.
2. How can the UN be responsible for the emerging tensions between others and mitigate them?
3. How can the UN address the environmental impact of deep-sea warfare and the effects it has on marine life?
4. What are technological solutions that countries can develop to help de-escalate naval standoffs before violence occurs?
5. How can different countries' cooperation exist between rival naval powers without weakening their defense?

TOPIC B: Rise of Gang Warfare & Cartel Control in Northern South America

Introduction

In the most recent decades, gang warfare and cartel activity have taken over parts of Latin America and posed themselves as a threat that is deeply rooted in corruption and violence. What initially began as groups of bandits and violent individuals soon developed into deeply intricate systems of gangs and cartels. These groups act as heads of state and work like a system of governance for many countries, despite their illegitimacy. This is due to a lack of proper governmental structures, allowing for the rise of cartels to take over entire elections and use citizens as pawns in their operations. Over time, these organizations have adapted faster than governments, embedding themselves into political, economic, and social structures.

In the modern day, this problem has transformed into a threat to state sovereignty and national security. A large part of the issue is that these gang-affiliated systems are deeply embedded in a community, making it almost impossible to overthrow them. Anyone who dares speak out against them, a politician, citizen, or even law enforcement, poses the imminent threat of death. Many individuals who have tried to make a stance against them sadly become examples of why not interfere with the cartels. In parallel to this, many political members in government are simply puppets put in place by the cartels to help them in their operation. These actions, however, don't just affect the state; they have impacts that linger on the global stage. Ecuador has now become a transit hub of crime, where criminal groups challenge the authority of the state. In partnership with this, Haiti represents one of the most severe cases of gang warfare leading to a near-total governmental collapse. We see similar patterns that can be observed globally, including in Myanmar's Golden Triangle. The triangle's drug production and the militia's power prolongs internal conflict.

This reality raises urgent questions for the entire international community. As governments struggle to contain cartel power and protect civilians, debates intensify over whether the United Nations should intervene in situations where gang warfare has overtaken entire regions. As a committee, you must all make this decision yourself.

The current state of Rise of Gang Warfare & Cartel Control in Northern South America:

In northern South America and the Caribbean region, there has been a significant rise in criminal activities, from local-level trafficking to highly organized criminal groups that have gained significant influence in controlling infrastructure, economic activity, and policy writ large. These criminal groups, formally known as cartels, compete with or even surpass local governments in performing basic functions of government, such as collecting revenues, maintaining law and order, and influencing political activities. This phenomenon has been associated with the rise of warfare and the expansion of these criminal groups, which has coincided with a rise in homicide rates, violence in prisons, and economic uncertainty (UNODC, 2022; Global Financial Integrity, 2023).

The region of northern South America has been of critical importance in the global narcotics trade. While cocaine production in these countries, including Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia, is largely concentrated, there has been a noticeable rise in violence in these regions due to the increasing global narcotics trade, especially in Europe. This phenomenon has resulted in these criminal groups focusing on gaining territorial control rather than remaining mobile (UNODC, 2022; Felbab-Brown, 2020).

The cartels' focus on territory has resulted in record violence throughout the region. In Ecuador, for instance, there has been a rise in violence from a mere 5.8 per 100,000 population in 2017 to over 45 per 100,000 population in 2023. Ecuador has become one of the most violent countries in Latin America (UNODC, 2023; Reuters, 2023). The rise of gang warfare in Haiti has led to the blockade of essentials, leading to the scarcity of food and fuel, which impacts the livelihoods of the population (International Crisis Group, 2024; Amnesty International, 2024).

Another factor in the consolidation of Mexican cartels has been their control of vital infrastructure. The ports of Ecuador, such as Guayaquil and Esmeraldas, are now major battlegrounds for cartel supremacy because of their strategic role in containerized shipping (Reuters, 2023; Global Witness, 2023). The cartels are increasingly using export cargo, such as bananas, shrimp, and timber, which are difficult to track in the global supply chain. Taking control of the unions and port officials has reduced the need for violence in the cartels' operations, making it much more efficient (Insight Crime, 2023; UNODC, 2022). In addition, the prison systems in the region are now under the governance of the cartels, with mass incarceration now allowing for the consolidation of gang leadership in prisons. The cartels in these prisons have improved these organizations' coordination, recruitment, and enforcement (International Crisis Group, 2023; Amnesty International, 2024). In Ecuador, intelligence reports indicate that most of the assassinations and extortions are directly orchestrated from prisons (International Crisis Group, 2023; UNODC, 2023). The cartel influence in prisons allows for a level of command that goes far beyond typical gang activities, with orders being given from inside the

penitentiary walls, showing just how deeply embedded these criminal organizations have become in state structures.

State Collapse and Power Vacuum: Haiti

The power vacuum in Haiti is a classic case of a failed state resulting in the rise of criminal governance. Years of political instability, corruption, and economic stagnation culminated in the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in 2021. The absence of a legitimate government has left the country in a security and governance power vacuum, which has allowed criminal organizations to thrive (Human Rights Watch, 2023; BBC News, 2023). The G9 Family and Allies and G-Pèp, two of the most prominent gangs, have control over major transportation routes, seaports, and fuel distribution. These gangs charge tolls, control the flow of people, and orchestrate widespread kidnappings and extortions, effectively terrorizing millions through their de facto control of state functions (Human Rights Watch, 2023; Global Crisis Group, 2023). The gangs have established control over critical resources, such as food and medical supplies, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. This example from Haiti demonstrates that the rise of criminal gangs is not merely a consequence of criminality and poverty, but rather a direct outcome of the collapse of the state. Once the state is replaced by criminal organizations, the power they wield becomes self-perpetuating, and the chances of the state being reinstated are minimal (UNODC, 2022; Global Financial Integrity, 2023). Criminal organizations in Haiti have not only gained control over government functions but also capitalized on the lack of international intervention, making it difficult for any external forces to restore order.

Cartels as De Facto Authorities: Ecuador

In contrast to Haiti, Ecuador had a strong state and low crime rates during the 2010s. However, due to its strategic position, including its ports, Ecuador was a critical location for international criminal organizations from across the region. This led to the formation of an alliance between Mexican cartels, including the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), and a multiplicity of gangs in Ecuador, resulting in the country becoming an important logistical center to facilitate drug trafficking operations (Insight Crime, 2023; UNODC, 2022). Ecuador's proximity to major drug production zones in Colombia and Peru made it an ideal location for cartels seeking to establish supply routes to the United States and beyond.

The cartels of Mexico have significant influence over Ecuador's prison systems, ports, and coastal areas, using the prisons as bases to run their operations. As a result, Ecuadorian prisons witnessed several massacres in 2021 and 2023, culminating in the deaths of hundreds and indicating the challenges the state faces in securing control over its prison systems (Amnesty International, 2024; International Crisis Group, 2024). The Mexican cartels' grip on these areas demonstrates the level of control they now exert over Ecuador's criminal landscape, transforming the nation into a central hub in the global narcotics trade. These gangs have not only infiltrated prisons but also have deepened their reach into other sectors of Ecuadorian society, contributing to the normalization of violence in the daily lives of Ecuadorians.

The rise of gang warfare and cartel control in northern South America represents a growing crisis fueled by the expansion of organized crime, which has increasingly filled power vacuums left by weak or failing states. In countries like Haiti, the collapse of government

institutions has enabled criminal organizations to have direct control over the security and economic conditions of entire regions. Ecuador, once a nation with strong state institutions, now faces cartel-driven violence and corruption, particularly in its prisons and ports. As cartels like the Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation Cartel deepen their influence across borders, the challenge of restoring state control becomes increasingly difficult. Ultimately, these developments highlight the profound impact of transnational organized crime on the stability of national governments, regional security, and the overall functioning of societies across the region.

Bloc positions Topic B

As cartels gain control of territories, infrastructure, and economies in Ecuador, Colombia, and Haiti, these nations become significantly less stable. As a result, international actors such as the United States have provided funding for anti-drug operations in these nations. For instance, the Merida Initiative provides over \$3 billion for law enforcement and military operations in these nations (U.S. Congress, 2017). While significant funding has been allocated, critics of this approach have argued that this foreign aid focuses on law enforcement strategies to counter cartel domination without tackling socio-economic factors that sustain cartel power in these nations across the region.

International actors have also played a crucial role in responding to the crisis in northern South America by coordinating efforts in cartel-dominated nations. For example, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has played a crucial role in responding to cartel domination in Ecuador, which has become a major center for drug trafficking in the region

(UNODC, 2023). In addition, the European Union has also played a critical role in responding to cartel domination in northern South America by supporting efforts to strengthen judicial systems in cartel-dominated nations in Latin America to ensure effective operations against cartel domination in these nations (Reuters, 2023).

Human rights actors in this region, such as Human Rights Watch, have also responded to cartel domination in northern South America by emphasizing the need for accountability in anti-cartel operations to ensure that human rights are not violated in these operations (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

Committee goals towards addressing Topic B:

Topic B situates itself in a highly complex narrative. This requires the committee to aim to develop realistic strategies to tackle gang violence and cartel influence in South America. In addition to this, all countries should account for the regional and global consequences of their actions. Poorly planned choices can often lead to a butterfly effect that can cripple countries and lead to further tensions between rivaling cartels.

This committee should focus on the prevention of drug transportation and attempt to dismantle cartels. However, it is up to each and every one of you on how you plan to do so. In order to do this, you are all expected to eventually address the failed or weakened governments in South America and propose methods to rebuild state capacity. This must be done without infringing on the national sovereignty of said country or their civilian autonomy. We encourage delegates to look mainly towards preventing further drug transportation between these countries and simultaneously focusing on limiting cartel power.

Questions to Consider

1. At what point does cartel influence constitute a parallel state?
2. Delegates should consider how corruption and weak institutions enable gang warfare.
3. How can countries within the UN work to solve the rise of gang warfare and violence?
4. How can countries tackle the issue of corruption in other countries' governments?
5. Delegates should wonder how global demand and consumer markets work together to fuel cartel power.
6. What are the methods to stop the rise of drugs in low-income communities and the transportation of illegal goods across borders?
7. Should the UN question the extent of drug violence driven by foreign consumer demand?

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