

General Assembly Fourth Committee: Special Political and Decolonization

Welcome

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to BUSUN 2010 and the Special Political and Decolonization committee (SPECPOL). My name is Mangala Patil and I will be your chair this November. Allow me to briefly introduce myself. I am a sophomore concentrating in Neuroscience. I have been involved in MUN for four years in high school and was Director for BUSUN '09's SPECPOL committee. In addition to MUN, I am also involved in Debate, The Triple Helix, and MPPB Research at Brown.

This background guide has been prepared to aid you in your research and preparation for committee. It is important to remember, however, that the information presented here may not be current at the time of the conference. It will be your responsibility to update yourselves on the most recent events regarding the topics.

Please feel free to e-mail any questions to SPECPOL@busun.net. I look forward to reading your position papers and seeing you in committee. Looking forward to a fantastic conference!

Regards,
Mangala Patil

Committee History

The 4th Main Committee of the General Assembly (Special Political and Decolonization Committee) deals with a variety of political subjects not dealt with by the First Committee, as well as with decolonization¹. The committee came into being in its present recognizable form in 1993. Its origins can, however, be

traced to the Special Political Committee that was formed as an ad-hoc committee in 1947 to deal specifically with issues of international politics and security.

The General Assembly maintained SPECPOL as an ad-hoc committee until 1978, when it replaced the Trusteeship Committee as the Fourth Committee. Ten years later, the United Nations declared the 1990s to be the "International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism."² In furtherance of this goal, the United Nations moved to modify SPECPOL, turning it into the Special Political and Decolonization Committee, with a mandate to oversee decolonization. As of 2005, the United Nations recognizes 15 Non-Self-Governing Territories.³ This number, of course, is highly disputed as some territories have had referendums where the people have rejected self-governance.

SPECPOL is primarily an advisory committee, recommending courses of action to the Security Council, specialized agencies of the United Nations, governments of member states, international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It does not have the power to take military action nor pass a binding resolution. During this conference, however, there will be no plenary session; therefore, all resolutions passed during the committee session will be deemed binding.

¹UN General Assembly -- Main Committee (<http://www.un.org/ga/maincommittees.shtml>)

²Please refer to General Assembly Resolution 43/46

³Refer to A/60/71

Topic 1: Arctic Territorial Claims and Exploration

The most basic definition of the Arctic defines the region as the land and sea area north of the Arctic Circle (circle of latitude

~66.30° North). Eight countries have territory north of the Arctic Circle: the United States (Alaska), Canada, Russia, Norway, Denmark (by virtue of Greenland, a member country of the Kingdom of Denmark), Finland, Sweden, and Iceland.² These eight countries are often referred to as the Arctic countries, and they are the member states of the Arctic Council, an intergovernmental forum established in 1996.³ A subset of the eight Arctic countries are the five countries that are considered Arctic coastal states: the United States, Canada, Russia, Norway, and Denmark (by virtue of Greenland).

The diminishment of Arctic sea ice has led to increased human activities in the Arctic, and has heightened concerns about the region's future. Issues such as Arctic sovereignty claims; commercial shipping through the Arctic; Arctic oil, gas, and mineral exploration; endangered Arctic species; and increased military operations in the Arctic could cause the region in coming years to become an arena of international cooperation, competition, or conflict.

Due to observed and projected climate change, scientists have concluded that the Arctic will have changed from an ice-covered environment to a recurrent ice-free ocean (in summers) as soon as the late 2030s.^{3,2} Loss of Arctic sea ice could also impact traditional livelihoods and cultures in the region and survival of polar bear and other animal populations, and raise risks of pollution, food supply, safety, and national security.

Motivated in part by a desire to exercise sovereign control over the Arctic region's increasingly accessible oil and gas reserves (see "Oil, Gas, and Mineral Exploration"), the four Arctic coastal states other than the United States—Canada, Russia, Norway, and Denmark (of which Greenland is a territory)—are in the process of preparing territorial claims in the Arctic, including claims for expanded Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), for submission to the

Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

The search for a shorter route from the Atlantic to Asia has been the quest of maritime powers since the Middle Ages. The melting of Arctic ice raises the possibility of saving several thousands of miles and several days of sailing between major trading blocs. Due to the international nature of the shipping industry, maritime trading nations have adopted international treaties that establish standards for ocean carriers in terms of safety, pollution prevention, and security. These standards are agreed upon by shipping nations through the International Maritime Organization (IMO), a United Nations agency that first met in 1959. However, due to issues such as the fragmented nature of ship administration there are still hurdles to regulatory enforcement.

Changes to the Arctic brought about by warming temperatures resulting from climate change will likely allow more exploration for oil and gas offshore where the extent of summer sea ice is shrinking. Similarly, shrinking glaciers onshore could expose land containing economic deposits of gold, iron ore, or other minerals that were previously covered by glacial ice. Warming that causes permafrost to melt could also pose challenges to onshore exploration activities because ground structures, such as pipelines and other infrastructure that depend on footings sunk into the permafrost for support, could become unstable. Despite the warming temperatures, however, exploration and development in the Arctic would still be subject to harsh conditions, especially in winter, which makes it costly and challenging to develop infrastructure necessary to produce, store, and transport oil, gas, and minerals from newly discovered deposits.

Questions to Consider:

1. How will national sovereignty be maintained when addressing the many issues surrounding the Arctic territorial claims?

2. What is the role of the UN in addressing these issues?

Topic 2: Transitional Governments (i.e. regime changes and overhaul)

A transitional or provisional government is a temporary government established in the absence of a political body due to the collapse of the original large government. Due fact that the government is only transitional, resulting instability is likely to occur. One method that has been employed to combat possible turmoil during these fragile periods of change is establishing a power-sharing transitional government.

Power-sharing transitional governments are common ingredients of peacemaking and peace building efforts. Power sharing guarantees the participation of representatives of significant groups in political decision-making, and especially in the executive, but also in the legislature, judiciary, police and army. By dividing power among rival groups during the transition, power sharing reduces the danger that one party will become dominant and threaten the security of others. Liberia, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Nepal, Iraq and Afghanistan are examples of countries where power-sharing transitional governments were responsible for guiding the complex processes of demobilization and re-integration of combatants, return of displaced persons, preparation of elections and the negotiation of new constitutions.

The international community seems to underestimate the need for third-party political engagement during transitional periods. Greater attention is paid to talks leading to peace agreements, while the negotiations taking place during the transitional period are not always equally supported. The fact that a government of national unity is in place is often seen as the

return to 'normality' and as the beginning of reconstruction and other 'post-conflict' activities. The skills deployed during transitional periods do not adequately include those required for mediation and continued political engagement. This approach reflects the exhaustion of international actors following lengthy peace talks, and the hope that peace agreements will bring the 'end' to the mediation process and the beginning of something significantly different. This approach is unfortunate given that the track record of transitional power-sharing governments shows that very often they require substantial support to achieve their goals.

The transitional period is a continuation of the peace talks and, as far as possible, international engagement facilitating these talks should remain in place. Third parties should see power-sharing transitional governments as vehicles through which the parties continue talking and negotiating. Given that not everything is resolved in peace agreements, the transitional period is an opportunity for the parties to stay engaged. Transitional periods are opportunities to expand participation beyond the signatories of peace agreements. Political engagement by third parties is often needed to bring non-signatory armed groups into the peace process, as well as to encourage power-sharing governments to allow unarmed opposition groups and the wider public to participate meaningfully in the transitional process.

Peace agreements should not include agreements on a country's long-term institutional arrangements. Long-term constitutions should ideally be decided through a transitional process that provides for wide-ranging elite discussions as well as public participation.

Questions to Consider:

1. What measures should be taken to best address and mitigate conflict in periods of

transitional governments?

2. What steps can be taken to optimize the power-shared transitional governments?

Topic 3: Stability of the Pakistani State

The traumatic separation of West and East Pakistan from the rest of British India produced deep-rooted scars and mistrust that still characterize relations between the two countries. During the partition process, hundreds of thousands died in widespread communal violence and millions were made homeless. In 1947, only a few months after Pakistan declared independence, the country was engaged in the first of four wars with India. The Dogra princely state of Jammu and Kashmir became bitterly contested by the two countries.

Pakistan's relations with its other significant neighbor, Afghanistan, have been equally characterized by structural tensions and attempts to impinge on the other's internal affairs, especially by Pakistan. Pakistan has always considered India a threat to its independence and stability, and to counter-balance this threat, over the last two decades it has attempted to exert influence on Afghanistan's domestic affairs.

Since the onset of the global War on Terror (WoT), FATA has been at the centre of the US and Pakistan's security forces' attempts to rein in the influence and striking capabilities of the Taliban operating on both sides of the border. The region is believed to have become 'a safe haven for a core group of nationally and internationally networked terrorists, a training and recruiting ground for Afghan Taliban, and, increasingly, a hotbed of indigenous militancy that threatens the stability of Pakistan's own state and society.

Pakistan's historical relations with Iran have largely been characterized by less confrontation than those observed with India

and Afghanistan. Domestic and international political developments, however, have had different effects on the two countries' reciprocal relationships. During the monarchy in Iran, relations were broadly friendly and based on common interests. However, the Iranian Revolution and Pakistan's support to the hard line Sunni Taliban movement in Afghanistan contributed to the creation of a sectarian-inspired fissure between the two countries.

More recently, and in line with its known pattern of global "soft power" expansion, China has been making stealthy but steady inroads into Pakistan's economic landscape. Attracted by the presence, especially in Baluchistan, of considerable deposits of natural resources (e.g. gas and minerals) and by the prospects of counter-balancing US presence in the region, China has been very active in offering its technical and financial support to the development of heavy infrastructure projects in the country (e.g. the Gwadar port and related rail links). Its careful and economic cooperation-based approach has won a fast and growing acceptance of its presence by the majority of Pakistan's population.¹⁶ However, where its intervention has intertwined with internal stability problems, China has often been the target of local rejection and even hostility.

In spite of the fact that they do not share borders, Pakistan's geopolitical position cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration its relations with the US. As already emphasized, the terrorist attacks on the US in September 2001 represent a watershed in the way in which the two countries are mutually linked.

Pakistan's geography has contributed to the challenge of governing parts of the country. The mountainous character of Baluchistan, FATA and much of NWFP, and the extended desert areas in southern Punjab, eastern Sindh and parts of Baluchistan, pose significant challenges to transport, communication, the delivery of goods and

services, and the provision of administration and security.

Parliamentary democracy was also inherited from the British. And with it came the rise to political prominence of the rural elites, since they had the power and money to influence the results of the elections. Repeated military takeovers have ensured that democratic systems of representation, even when they are in place, continue to be manipulated by the army and the civil bureaucracy. This systemic dysfunction has continued unabated till today.

Furthermore, Pakistan's legal framework has never been stable. The constitution has been abrogated and fundamental legislation has been molded by successive Pakistani leaders to suit their needs.

Macro-economic management in Pakistan has recently shown some signs of weakening, after clear improvement had been achieved during the last few years. Due to persistent privatization and liberalization policies, there are no state-owned enterprises in Pakistan that can that show large revenues. Most of them have been already privatized, while the remaining ones are either in the process of being privatized, or are being restructured. The private sector is therefore penetrating all sectors of the country's economy, with the only exception of the defense and security industry, which is still kept under government control.

The media has also undergone a deep privatization drive. Out of about 50 TV channels and networks in Pakistan, only one is state-owned (i.e. the Pakistan Television Network, or PTV).

Pakistan's leaders have always faced a fundamental problem of nation- and state-building. Pakistan's traumatic birth, the impact of its division between East and West, the bloody secession of Bangladesh, and its insecure boundaries (explored above) have all challenged the idea of Pakistan as a unified

nation-state with fixed boundaries and shared identities. This idea has been further challenged by the autonomous histories and strong ethnic identities of each of Pakistan's four provinces.

Questions to Consider:

1. How do more recent events, such as the overthrowing of Musharraf's regime contribute to the ongoing struggle of establishing a stable Pakistani government?

References:

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