Special Political and Decolonization Committee

Chairs:
Andrew Wu
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Letter from the Chairs

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2019 MIT Model United Nations Conference (MITMUNC)! We are excited to introduce you to our committee, the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL).

My name is Andrew Wu, and I'm currently a freshman, planning on studying Chemistry and Computer Science. While I have attended numerous Model UN conferences in my four years as a delegate, this is my first time chairing a committee, so I look forward to working with you all! I'm extremely interested in politics and international relations, and I'm very excited to see the amazing ideas you all come up with. If you have any questions about MIT, MUN, or anything in general, feel free to talk to me!

My name is Edward Jin, and I'm a freshman studying chemistry, mathematics, and computer science. I'm also interested in political science as a whole, specifically in foreign policy. I've competed in Model UN all throughout high school and been to many conferences both as a delegate and a chair. I hope that the discussion of world issues within this committee will be rewarding to all involved, and the solutions even more so.

The following are the topics that we plan to debate in SPECPOL:

I. Conflict in Yemen
II. Resources in Space

This guide is meant to be an introduction to the topics and should not replace individual research. We hope that you take the time to research your topics and your delegation's affiliation with the given issues.
In preparation for the conference, each delegate will submit a **single page position paper** on each topic to mitmunc-specpol@mit.edu.

We encourage you to take the time to read up on parliamentary procedures - however in the interest of time and fruitful debate, we will go over a few changes to our committee at the start of the conference. If you have any questions at all, feel free to reach out to us at mitmunc-specpol@mit.edu.

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

Sincerely,

Andrew Wu
Edward Jin

Topic I: Conflict in Yemen

Introduction

The Yemeni Civil War started in 2015 between a Houthi rebel movement and the internationally-recognized government supported by Saudi Arabia, and has continued since then to become one of the worst conflicts of the century. Other groups such as the Southern Transitional Council (STC), Al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) have also been involved with the war in Yemen. This fighting resulted in the United Nations Development Program stating that the war has "reversed the country's hard-won development gains by 21 years." since then. Indiscriminate airstrikes on hospitals and other civilian areas as well as blockades of crucial ports have severely crippled Yemen's ability to support its population with basic needs. Widespread famine has spread across the country and it is estimated that 130 children or more die every day in war-torn Yemen from extreme hunger and disease. As of today, there has been very little progress made towards finding either solutions to the conflict or the civil problems caused by it.

Background

In the early 2010s, anti-government movements collectively known as the "Arab Spring" started across much of the Middle East and North Africa. These protest movements were motivated by a wide variety of reasons and ultimately resulted in different outcomes for different countries, with complete suppression in some and regime change in others. In Yemen, the long-time president Ali Abdullah Saleh was forced to step down and was replaced by the former vice-president Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. However, Saleh's previous widespread influence across Yemen resulted in instability after he left, and Hadi's new government could not overcome these difficulties.

As a result of this instability, various groups were able to win popular support against Hadi's government. From the North, the Shiite-majority Houthis were able to take over the majority of the country and the capital Sana'a in 2014, which resulted in them declaring a new government that has not seen much international support. This takeover caused Hadi to flee the country to Saudi Arabia, and a military campaign aimed at restoring Hadi's power has been led by Saudi Arabia and backed by many middle eastern and western powers, including the United States. Suicide bombings and other efforts led by ISIL have complicated the situation as well, with attacks on the Houthis, Al-Qaeda, and the internationally recognized government. In 2017, the STC joined the fighting on the side of Hadi's government; however, internal conflicts have caused the STC to split off and take over part of the south of Yemen, with the ultimate goal of secession from North Yemen. Each group involved in the conflict has its own (sometimes changing) goals, which make it hard to come to a resolution that works favorably for all parties involved.

Factors to Address

Humanitarian Aid and Prevention of Famine

Due to destruction of the country's medical facilities and lack of access to food and water, famine and many preventable diseases such as cholera have spread across Yemen. Currently, it is estimated that about $3 billion will be needed to assist with humanitarian causes; however, a nearly $2 billion funding gap still remains. Further, blockades of critical ports across Yemen could cause humanitarian aid to be slowed or even stopped. The ports provide a crucial lifeline to the Yemeni population, which "imported about 90 per cent of its staple food and nearly all fuel and medicine" even before the crisis. Potential solutions should address the means of aid distribution and its funding, as well as a self-sufficiency plan for Yemen in the future.

Violations of International Law and its Consequences

Civilians have been the brunt of "indiscriminate attacks, bombing, snipers, unexploded ordnance, cross-fire, kidnapping, rape and arbitrary detention." Further, indiscriminate airstrikes have hit hospitals, funerals, and camps for displaced people, killing innocent civilians. This is especially concerning since the coalition received accurate GPS data about the locations of these civilian activities (to avoid them), and some countries have already taken steps to stop supplying the coalition with weapons in protest of these airstrikes. Resolutions should strongly attempt to respect the rights of civilians and attempt to lessen civilian casualties not only in the war, but also after.

Influence of Foreign Powers

Another aspect of international law is in the influence of neighboring countries in Yemen itself. The Saudi-led coalition was justified with Article 51 of the UN Charter, which states that countries have a right to self-defence against foreign powers. However, other countries such as Iran and the United Arab Emirates have also been respectively supporting the Houthis and STC. The United Arab Emirates have also launched their own military campaigns, for example, in Socotra. For Yemen to be self-sufficient and develop independently, it is critical that it adopts a stable form of government that does not lend itself to intervention or significant influence from other countries.

Prevention of the Spread of Terrorism

Due to the instability within Yemen, terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIL have been able to extend its influence. The conflicts within Yemen have drawn many to lose faith in both the Houthis and Hadi, instead turning to more extremist viewpoints. Al-Qaeda controls approximately a third of Yemen currently and ISIL has also been attempting to increase its influence as well. These groups

could potentially spread their influence and instability to neighboring countries. Potential solutions to the Yemeni conflict should address the key issues causing public discontent and also attempt to prevent terrorist viewpoints from spreading further.

Regional Balance of Power

Many observers have seen the conflict in Yemen simply as a proxy war between the majority Sunni Muslim countries and Shiite Iran. Some have speculated that Iran has been secretly supplying the Houthi rebels, and the Saudi-led coalition has simply been an attempt to reduce Iran's influence in the region. These conflicts of power between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and more generally between Shiite and Sunni Muslims, have caused instability in countries across the Middle East in various time periods (such as Lebanon). Steps need to be taken to ensure the regional balance of power continues to prevent a similar crisis from happening.

Country Positions and Possible Blocs

African Union - The African Union itself has not articulated a position on the crisis, and its member states have a variety of policies, from support and direct participation in the military intervention to complete opposition. It is recommended that countries within the African Union do not stay together as one bloc, but rather pursue their own country's policies and create positive discussions with countries with similar policies.

Arab League - The majority of the Arab League supports the Saudi intervention in Yemen and sees it as restoring the rightful government of Yemen. However, Oman has taken a more neutral stance and attempted to hold talks to resolve the conflict, and Iraq and Iran have outright opposed the

intervention in Yemen. Similar to the African Union, it is recommended that countries within the Arab League with differing policies do not stay together as one bloc.

European Union - The EU has stated that military intervention is not the solution to resolving the Yemeni crisis. However, some EU members such as France and the United Kingdom have been directly funding arms sales to the Saudi coalition.

Asian Countries (Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, etc.) - Many countries in Asia have called for cessation of military actions and for dialogue to be the primary means of resolution. These countries are not heavily impacted by the Yemeni crisis and would most likely not take decisive actions by themselves.

Russia - Russia has criticized the Saudi-led coalition and called for pauses in airstrikes to address humanitarian concerns. Russia has similar policies to other countries that oppose the intervention and a productive atmosphere can be achieved through collaboration with them.

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Topic 2: Resources in Space

Introduction

While SPECPOL primarily concerns itself with issues of peacekeeping and decolonization, it also concerns itself with the colonization of space. Particularly, the committee is primarily concerned with the adequate designation of resources, peaceful expansion, and equality of access towards space. In the past, space exploration was a primarily nationalized endeavor: the cold war exemplified this, as the United States and the Soviet Union put in massive amounts of resources annually into developing space travel and technologies. However, as space travel has become cheaper and more accessible, new companies have emerged, such as SpaceX, Blue Origin, and Virgin Galactic, that have begun to privatize and commercialize space travel. Thus, in the changing landscape of space travel, it has become increasingly paramount that the United Nations develop strong, robust infrastructure to properly address both the public and private exploration and development of space. Thus, there are many questions, including how to divide resources among countries, to ensure equal access to space, to encourage collaboration between nations and corporations, and how to properly balance power between countries and companies.

Background

Historically, the relevance of SPECPOL towards space began with the establishment of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) in 1959. This committee was established on the principles of reviewing international cooperation, assisting space research, organizing the exchange of space information, and to encourage countries to develop their own space programs. Furthermore, COPUOS is also intended to deal with legal problems arising from space travel, albeit such problems are relatively minute (few legal problems have occurred in space

so far). The COPUOS was originally intended to be a collaborative committee between many developed countries, most particularly the United States and the Soviet Union, based on the primary belief that exploring space was in the best interest of mankind. Thus, the infrastructure that has been developed over the last few decades has primarily dealt with the division of resources and power between established nation-states.

There are four main United Nations treaties regarding outer space:

1. Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, also known as the Outer Space Treaty

First signed in 1966 by the Russian Federation, the United States, and the United Kingdom, this treaty formed the basis for all future international space laws. Among its guiding principles were the following: the exploration of outer space should be done to benefit all countries, outer space is free of claims of sovereignty, and that the moon, as well as other celestial bodies, should be used entirely for peaceful purposes. While the treaty seems to answer many of the questions regarding space, it fails to account for the introduction of privatization, and thus the question remains: how can the United Nations build on the Outer Space Treaty, adapting it to better fit the political and economic landscape of the 21st century? Some answers may lie in permit-systems for companies, a free market, or greater national control over space exploration.

2. Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space, also known as the Rescue Agreement

Signed in 1967, this treaty built on the principles of the Outer Space Treaty, assuring that any astronaut whom a state can identify is in danger should be rescued immediately, as well as properly cared for. Primarily, it attempts to specify parts of the Outer Space Treaty to properly identify people who should be rescued. However, modern criticism lies in the question of whom the burden of rescue should fall onto, as well as the question of who should be responsible for saving private astronauts, or even people who simply have paid for a trip to space? The solution may very well be the establishment of an international organization for saving astronauts, or simply to place the burden on the companies sending people to space. Regardless, a solution must be reached before space travel can be reasonably accomplished.

3. Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects, also known as the Space Liability Convention

Similar to the Rescue Agreement, the Space Liability Convention aims to properly qualify and specify the Outer Space Treaty. Primarily, the Space Liability Convention aimed to address the question of liability: that is, who should pay the damages for any spacecraft failure. The Space Liability Convention primarily placed the blame on the country who started the launch. However, again, like the other two treaties, how would such a treaty function under privatization; what if a company is unable to pay the damages and goes bankrupt? A system of accountability is necessary; a corporation is not itself punishable.

4. Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space, also known as the Registration Convention

Put into effect in 1976, this treaty aimed to maintain international order with regard to space launch by maintaining an international database containing the orbits of all spacecraft launched into orbit. In essence, this accomplished two main goals: one, allowing the ease of space object identification, and two, helping in the dissemination of space information.

Aside from these, many other international treaties have been signed with regards to international space travel, as well as many other international organizations, all in the interest of preventing space conflict and encouraging collaboration.

Factors to Consider

1. The question of increasing privatization

As has been previously discussed, privatization has radically changed the landscape of space exploration. Changing the existing infrastructure to expand its hold beyond simply independent nations towards including and accounting for corporations is paramount towards the possibility for organized, productive progress in space travel. Additionally, how can the COPUOS and other space organizations be adapted to further assist these independent corporations, and to further require these corporations to follow the same rules that countries typically follow? Essentially, consider the four main objectives of COPUOS towards space travel: reviewing international cooperation, assisting space research, organizing the exchange of space information, and encouraging the development of space programs, and examine how these should be modified and adapted to address different landscapes, both technologically and taking privatization into account. Some possible

solutions may be to totally ban private corporations in favor of organized, international collaboration, or simply to work actively to promote private corporations.

2. The question of modern resource allocation

Additionally, it is crucial that the committee not lose sight of its original goals: the proper allocation of resources. While the Outer Space Treaty seems to provide an adequate solution to this question, how should our allocation of resources change with privatization, and how should it change now that we have a better grasp of what space travel will look like? Some see it as irresponsible of the Outer Space Treaty to naively have opened up space to be free for the taking, and it is more important to provide structure, such as the idea of limiting the amount of resources any one country can amass. Further, one of the most important goals of SPECPOL is to introduce infrastructure that avoids conflict: if space is viewed as an open frontier for countries to gain access to, there must be some structure in place to avoid the conflict that should naturally develop. This may take the form of a weapons ban in space, an international regulatory organization, or simply a pre-emptive peace treaty. Thus, it is crucial that this committee address both the question of resource allocation and how resource allocation can be developed to avoid conflicts and prevent abusive power dynamics.

Potential Country Blocs and Positions

US, UK (NATO countries) - These countries have historically supported each other in political issues deeply rooted in power dynamics such as these, so it is not unreasonable that they all support each other. Furthermore, the U.S. often collaborates with these countries in joint missions to develop and send missions into space, and is often more willing to provide aid to NATO countries.

Former Soviet Union Countries (Czech Republic, Russian Federation, etc.) - These countries, like NATO, have historical experience with each other, coupled with the fact that their interests are deeply geographically linked, as resources obtained by these countries could be easily shared with one another

Asian Countries (China, India, etc.) - Relative newcomers to the pursuit of space travel, these countries have rapidly proved themselves as technologically capable of reaching space. However, their infrastructure is not as developed as either the United States or Russia, so they could unite over a belief that space resource allocation should be fairly allotted to each country, regardless of relative space-reaching ability.

US, Russia - Thinking about the topic differently, the division in blocs may be based upon a "first come first serve" approach versus an "equal resources for all" approach: countries who have more access to space would be more inclined to want resources to be given simply to whoever can reach them first.

Middle East - Traditionally marred by conflict, the Middle East has seldom had a say in anything space-related. However, with the recognition that space has the ability to revolutionize current geographic power dynamics, addressing the issue of space, particularly the need for equal access, could be a key driving force in uniting the Middle Eastern countries.

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