



STUDY GUIDE FOR



**SPECIAL POLITICAL &
DECOLONIZATION
COMMITTEE**

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SPECIAL POLITICAL & DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE

INTRODUCTION:

Formally known as the Fourth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL) was established in 1993 when the General Assembly combined the Fourth Committee on Decolonization with the former Special Political Committee. This union was a result of the United Nations' evolving priorities in the post-Cold War era, when many decolonization cases had already been settled, but political matters like peacekeeping and the Palestinian conflict needed a permanent venue.

Initially, it handled the affairs of areas that were placed under UN trusteeship, meaning that the UN had authority over them until they gained their independence. The Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) was able to concentrate on military matters like nuclear non-proliferation after it eventually assumed some of its responsibilities. The legacy of SPECPOL is tied to the UN's historical role in assisting non-self-governing regions in their quest for independence and its ongoing obligation to discuss political issues outside the purview of other organizations.



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Unlike specialized agencies, SPECPOL operates under the General Assembly's auspices and lacks a distinct executive directorate. Rather, the Committee's Chairperson, who is chosen by member states each year, and a Bureau made up of Vice-Chairs and a Rapporteur, oversee its operations. The UN Secretariat and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA - Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs) offer administrative and technical assistance, guaranteeing the efficient organization of resolutions, reports, and discussions. All 193 UN Member States are guaranteed equal participation in its operations through this arrangement.

The mandate of SPECPOL is extensive and involves concerns of decolonization, the oversight of UN peacekeeping operations and special political missions, the situation in the Middle East, including the topic of Palestine, the peaceful uses of outer space, and the impacts of atomic radiation. It reviews reports from the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, the Special Committee on Decolonization, and the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, among others, although it neither orders nor authorizes military action. Creating proposals for the General Assembly and offering a forum for debate on politically delicate issues that call for international agreement are also among its duties.

In the future, SPECPOL hopes to increase the efficiency and accountability of UN peacekeeping operations, ensure equitable treatment of the Palestinian question, and complete the UN's decolonization objective. It is also anticipated that the committee would be more involved in tackling contemporary global issues, including the political ramifications of nuclear technologies, the militarization of space, and displacement caused by climate change in decolonized areas. SPECPOL seeks to continue being an essential platform for group decision-making and political collaboration inside the UN system by modifying its agenda in response to changing global conditions.



AGENDA

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE AS SOFT POWER, THE EXPORT OF THEORETIC GOVERNANCE MODELS TO SECULAR AND TRANSITIONAL STATES

Overview:

One of the most reliable sources of political power, legitimacy, and identity throughout history has been religion. Today, it functions as a strategic tool of statecraft in international relations in addition to being a matter of personal opinion. States engage in what is known as religious soft power—a type of persuasion that depends less on force or financial leverage and more on ideals, attraction, and a common identity—when they employ religious narratives, institutions, and networks to increase their influence. Religious soft power goes beyond cultural diplomacy, which frequently depends on language, the arts, or education, by working to alter recipient governments' social contracts and governmental systems. This is especially effective when aimed at secular or transitional nations, which are more vulnerable to outside ideological influence since they may be going through identity crises, governance voids, or weak institutions.

Target governments' sovereignty and development paths may be significantly impacted by the export of theocratic governance models, whether via political sponsorship, religious instruction, financial help, or transnational clerical networks. Advocates contend that in countries that are experiencing fragmentation, these models offer unity, stability, and moral support. However, detractors warn that they can worsen sectarian differences, weaken secular institutions, and undermine pluralism—often solidifying dictatorship under the pretense of religious authority.



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Key Terminologies

Soft Power:

The power of a country to influence others through culture, ideology, and attraction, rather than coercion.

Theocratic Governance: A political system in which religious leaders control the government

Secularism:

A principle that separates religion from other realms of human existence

Transitional States: Countries in a political flux, often moving toward new governance structures

Religious Diplomacy:

The practice of leveraging religious beliefs, institutions, leaders to promote peace among different countries

Norm Diffusion: The spreading of different ideologies across borders

Sharp Power:

Manipulative information strategies that usually accompany soft power

Securitization: Portraying religious influence as a threat

Historical Context

Cold War Period:

Religion became a tool of worldwide ideological competition during the Cold War. Religion, especially Christianity, was portrayed by the US and its allies as a moral alternative to the official atheism of communism. Washington encouraged "religious freedom" as a defining feature of liberal democracy, backed missionary education, and provided funding for religious broadcasting. As a form of soft-power diplomacy, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and affiliated nongovernmental groups frequently collaborated with churches and faith-based organizations to deliver aid. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, made an effort to stifle religious freedom but ultimately employed organizations like Islamic councils and the Russian Orthodox Church as manipulated instruments of legitimacy to encourage socialist allegiance.



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A dual dynamic resulted from this conflict. Communist governments used religious organizations under state control to project internal control and exterior alignment with socialist governance models, while Western states aimed to strengthen religion as a defense against communism.

The internationalization of theocratic models beyond the Christian-Communist struggle also occurred during the Cold War. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 marked a turning point in Islamic history by establishing Velayat-e Faqih (Guardianship of the Jurist), a new system of government that combined republican institutions with clerical authority. This model offered an alternative to both Western liberal democracy and secular nationalism, inspiring Islamist movements in Lebanon, Iraq, and other places.

Theocratic governance "templates" that vied for acceptance in transitional regimes were therefore created during the Cold War era, when religion was institutionalized not just as culture but also as a proxy for statecraft.

Post-Cold War to Present:

A favourable environment for religion to reemerge as a key axis of identity and government was created by the conclusion of the Cold War and the breakdown of bipolar politics. With churches regaining prominence in politics, education, and the law, the revival of Orthodox Christianity in Eastern Europe was crucial to state-building and constitutional discussions. Similarly, a surge of Pentecostal and evangelical involvement occurred in Latin America in the 1990s and 2000s, impacting social legislation and electoral politics in democratizing republics.

The post-9/11 world intensified the stakes. Certain religious exports, especially transnational Islamist doctrines, were framed as security risks by the United States and its allies. Secular, federalist, or hybrid options faced out against imported theocratic models in transitional governments like Iraq, Afghanistan, and subsequently Libya. Another pivotal moment was presented by the Arab Spring (2011), as Islamic political organizations, secular parties, and foreign-backed actors fought over



whether governance should be pluralistic or anchored in religion in the context of transitional constitutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. Globalization and digital media increased religious influence outside of the Middle East; from Nigeria to Myanmar, diaspora groups, online clerics, and transnational charity all played significant roles in influencing governance discussions.

In the 2020s, new problems have surfaced, including the weaponization of disinformation through religious narratives, the militarization of space with religious rhetoric, and the growth of Hindu nationalism as an exportable model. Religion is still a double-edged sword in modern times, acting as a catalyst for global theocratization in unstable or transitional nations as well as a source of identification and peacebuilding.

Current Situation

Today, religious soft power is still relevant and powerful. Without using force, states use it to influence the political norms, culture, and values of other nations. Around the world, this movement manifests itself in a variety of ways.

- The Russian Orthodox Church, for instance, today closely reflects the objectives of the Russian state. As a result, Putin gains symbolic legitimacy and strengthens his hold on foreign Orthodox and Slavic populations. Although it is soft power, it has the potential to become sharp power by causing tension and turning religious identity into a political fault line.
- China uses religion as a diplomatic tool as well. Through the construction of temples, the lending of relics, and worldwide friendship campaigns, it spreads Buddhism throughout the world, particularly in countries like Sri Lanka and Thailand. This endeavor enhances its cultural reputation and facilitates its geopolitical trajectory.
- States like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Qatar have changed their approaches in the Muslim world. Saudi Arabia started encouraging interfaith discussion instead of exporting Wahhabism.



- The United Arab Emirates presents itself as a tolerant, moderate Islamic state. In the wake of the Arab Spring, Qatar supported populist Islamic movements. The goal of these soft-power strategies is to raise regional status.
- Turkey is equally well-known. The Diyanet, its official religious organization, has historically been a vehicle for both foreign and internal political influence. By establishing cultural institutions and sending imams overseas, Turkey spreads its religious model—which is more Ottoman-influenced and less secular—in other parts of the world. Religious relationships are a component of Iran and Turkey's larger soft-power rivalry in the Caucasus.

Religious soft power is increasing on a global scale. Some states portray religion as a component of a contemporary, development-aligned identity. Through faith-based groups, they fund environmental initiatives, interfaith discussions, and humanitarian efforts. In developing and transitional nations where secular administration is still lacking, these acts lend them legitimacy.

International and Regional Frameworks

The United Nations Charter, which forbids meddling in domestic matters and demands that states preserve sovereignty, serves as the cornerstone. These fundamental values could be violated by any outside influence, especially religious soft power that veers into coercive or subversive behavior.

The UN General Assembly's 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief provides even more precision. Key articles include:

- Article 1: “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion... freedom ... to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.”, “No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom...”
- Article 2: Prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion or belief.
- Article 6: Recognizes collective expressions such as establishing places of worship, leading seminars, writing publications, and receiving financial contributions.



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The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) declares: *“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief...”*

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), a binding treaty for states, restates this: *“Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion... to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.”*

The GA reiterated these concerns in resolution 55/97 in 2000. States were asked to ensure religious or belief freedom within the law. In the event that infractions occur, states shall offer efficient remedies. The resolution emphasizes that restrictions on religious expression must be proportionate, mandated by law, and required to safeguard public health, morals, public order, or other people's rights.

These safeguards are reflected in the *European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)*. Religious expression, as well as freedom of thought and conscience, are guaranteed by Article 9. Freedom of expression is protected by Article 10. Crucially, neither right is unqualified. States have the authority to restrict them, but only in order to safeguard public order or other rights.

States are guided in fostering tolerance via education and culture by UNESCO's *Declaration of Principles on Tolerance*. It claims that the best strategy to fight intolerance is education. Critical thinking, unity, and respect should be taught in schools. To promote diversity and avoid conflict, states should create curricula and provide instructors with training.



Funding

Transnational networks of religious institutions, individual donations, and state sponsorship all contribute to the maintenance of religious soft power. Religious education, cultural centers, international clerical exchanges, and media transmission are all funded in part by major state players, like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and Russia, through their national budgets or state-affiliated charitable foundations. Rich individual donors and diaspora groups also make contributions by funding schools, mosques, and non-governmental organizations overseas, frequently in line with the political or ideological inclinations of their home governments. Funding for humanitarian projects under religious guises is occasionally provided by international organizations and faith-based NGOs, which can tangentially increase a state's soft power overseas. Because of this intricate financial system, religious influence is influenced by both well-funded strategies and ideas, with billions of dollars being invested each year to export theocratic governance models into transitional and secular states.

Core Principles

1. Sovereignty and Non-Intervention

The idea of state sovereignty, which is closely related to the ban on outside intervention, is at the heart of international law. Article 2(7) of the United Nations Charter explicitly stipulates that neither the UN nor its member states may get involved in issues that primarily lie under a state's domestic purview. "No State has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatsoever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State," the General Assembly's Resolution 2131 (XX) on the Inadmissibility of Intervention, reaffirmed this principle.

2. Responsibility to Protect

The developing theory of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) also touches on the controversy surrounding religious influence. R2P, which was adopted in the early 2000s, acknowledges that sovereignty is a duty as well as a protection, with governments being obligated to defend their citizens against atrocity crimes such as crimes against humanity, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and genocide.



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Strong governments are those that defend their citizens without outside interference, as the UN Secretary-General has underlined time and time again, arguing that R2P is an ally of sovereignty rather than an enemy. Therefore, even while international law acknowledges situations in which protection takes precedence over sovereignty, religious soft power shouldn't be used as a cover for intervention or to undermine pluralism.

3. Risk of Minority Rights Erosion

How foreign religious models may interact with weak domestic systems during times of change is another crucial principle to take into account. Certain religious traditions have the potential to enhance cultural life, but foreign influence frequently brings with it prescriptive ideas that are incompatible with diversity. For instance, the constitutional declaration during Sudan's transition from 2019 to 2021 made it plain that the country was a "multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-cultural" community and that the creation of an official religion was strictly forbidden. Sudan's history of religiously driven governance, which had disenfranchised non-Muslim communities and women's rights, made this precaution imperative.

4. Religious Diplomacy as a Strategic Tool

In the twenty-first century, religious diplomacy—the use of religious networks, institutions, and narratives by nations to increase their influence overseas—has become a prominent aspect of statecraft. Religious diplomacy frequently bears direct political and ideological weight which places an emphasis on shared heritage or artistic expression. For example, India's state-sponsored initiatives to promote Buddhist and Hindu customs show a calculated attempt to influence regional attitudes. When carried out openly, such diplomacy can promote communication and understanding between parties, but its main objective is frequently to align foreign political and social structures with the donor state's model.



5. Need for Transparency and Accountability:

Lastly, the issue of cross-border religious influence emphasizes how urgently accountability and transparency are needed. Institutions, charities, and religious groups frequently receive large sums of foreign financing, which, in the absence of adequate supervision, may be exploited to impose indirect political pressure or propagate partisan views. States in transition should think about enacting laws requiring the disclosure of foreign funding for religious media outlets, curricula, and institutions in order to stop this. Accountability procedures enable governments to safeguard pluralism and thwart manipulation, while transparency guarantees that citizens are aware of who is funding particular messages.

Case Studies

China's Buddhist Soft Power in Sri Lanka:

In Sri Lanka, China has deliberately employed Buddhism as a soft power tool. It connects religious diplomacy and infrastructural development through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It constructs Buddhist sites, provides assistance to temples, and hosts gatherings such as the "South China Sea Buddhism Roundtable," which in 2023 brought together 400 monks and representatives from 25 nations. This improves Beijing's reputation and increases its sway over countries with a majority of Buddhists.

Israel's Influence over Regional Politics

Israel has a unique role in religious diplomacy because of its relevance to Judaism (as well as to Christian and Muslim sacred sites). In the US, political support for Israeli policies is influenced by evangelical Christian support. The Abraham Accords were also framed by religious narratives; in several Arab republics, naming the deal after a common patriarch facilitated political normalization. Thus, Israel's religious outreach overseas and its administration of holy sites have a direct political impact on regional alignments and friends.



Iran's Influence through Hezbollah in Lebanon

Due to decades of political, educational, and religious engagement, Iran has a significant and multifaceted influence on Lebanon. Tehran has provided financial support to Lebanese Shi'ite clerics, social organizations, and military groups—most notably Hezbollah—since the Iranian Revolution in 1979. In 1982, Hezbollah was established with strong Iranian backing. Iran has continuously contributed money, weapons, training, and ideological support.

Hezbollah became a significant military and political power in Lebanon as a result of this backing. Iran also shapes ideological currents by sponsoring Lebanese students attending Qom's Islamic schools. Its welfare networks also increase public loyalty by filling in state deficiencies. Iran's political influence in Lebanon has significantly increased as a result of all of this.

Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States

For many years, Saudi Arabia used its oil wealth to support Islamic NGOs around the world, madrassas, mosques, and scholarships. Many nations in Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia adopted conservative social values and jurisprudence as a result of this support. Gulf philanthropy networks possess the soft power to affect media, charitable systems, and curricula in less developed states. Although some Gulf governments have changed their rhetoric over time to emphasize "moderation," the infrastructure they established continues to influence local legislation in a number of transitional cultures around public morals, education, and families.

Russian Geopolitical Reach through the Orthodox Church

The Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian state collaborate to spread a narrative of civilization over Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Although Orthodox relationships frequently result in political power, Moscow portrays them as a kind of spiritual and cultural cooperation. Religious diplomacy has been used to oppose Western models of secular governance and to favor friendly regimes in nations with an Orthodox majority. Moscow uses the Orthodox narrative to legitimize associated political players and exert soft power in disputed areas.



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Challenges in the Implementation and Enforcement

1. Balancing Transparency with Religious Freedom

Increasing oversight of religious groups without compromising their autonomy is a significant challenge. For example, the Productivity Commission of Australia recommended that fundamental religious charities be subject to additional governance and financial reporting requirements. Faith organizations cautioned that this might allow for meddling with religious leadership, claiming that doing so could violate constitutional rights such as the Free Exercise Clause and undermine public confidence.

2. Restrictive Legal Environments

Secular and transitional states may impose strict regulations on religious organizations' registration and supervision. For instance, Pakistan now mandates that NGOs, including religious organizations, register with provincial Charity Commissions, secure MOUs for foreign funding, deal with a number of regulatory agencies, and risk de-registration if they don't comply.

3. Authoritarian Use of "Foreign Agent" Laws

To silence independent religious views, some states use "foreign agent" or "excessive foreign funding" legislation. Even if religious institutions are not specifically mentioned, Kyrgyz draft regulations (like those in Russia) would force organizations that receive foreign funding and participate in "political activities" to register as "foreign representatives" and be subject to strict surveillance.

4. Weak Governance and Financial Oversight

Financial transparency is frequently missing in nations with subpar regulatory regimes. Few religious non-profits (RNPOs) in Malaysia make their audited reports available to the public, according to a study on the subject. Statutory disclosure requirements are either non-existent or insufficient, and internal governance frameworks are inadequate. This opacity increases the possibility of radicalization or abuse.



5. Instrumentalization of Religious Narratives for Geopolitical Gain

Sometimes, religious soft power is employed for more general geopolitical objectives. For example, the UAE presents a picture of moderate Islam while isolating competitors like Qatar and utilizing religious narratives to support interventions like those in Libya and Yemen.

The Way Forward: Proposed Measures and Recommendations

Governments ought to create reporting guidelines that are both significant and less intrusive. Transparency, for instance, may be incorporated into Australia's ACNC recommendations without affecting internal leadership. Frameworks for regulations must be uniform and non-arbitrary. Governance norms can also be the responsibility of religious organizations. Organizations advocating financial transparency are accredited by the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA), a U.S.-based organization. Religion can be used positively by governments and international organizations. Policy monitoring is essential.

Both secular and transitional regimes' governance and stability are nonetheless shaped by religious influence as a type of soft power. The proliferation of theocratic models raises concerns about inclusivity, minority rights, and long-term democratic resilience, even while they can offer moral guidance, identity, and communal solidarity during times of political unpredictability. The UN is essential in striking a balance between respect for religious traditions and the advancement of pluralistic and accountable governance because of its focus on international law, human rights, and sustainable development.



QARMA

1. How can states create religious financing transparency regulations that protect freedom and accountability?
2. What safeguards are in place to guarantee that religious organizations can register and function without excessive delay or political bias?
3. How might state oversight be supplemented by self-regulatory organizations such as accrediting councils?
4. How can faith-based organizations and other forms of international religious diplomacy promote peaceful transitions?
5. What mechanisms will be in place to track and assess the effects of religious soft power, specifically with regard to pluralism and national unity?
6. How can secular nations defend their political structures against outside religious soft power without limiting religious freedom?
7. Should transitional governments follow international standards for striking a balance between the development of democratic institutions and religious influence?
8. Do cultural diplomacy and religious influence in foreign policy go hand in hand, or are they distinct?

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AGENDA B

RECONSIDERING THE UN TRUSTEESHIP SYSTEM: CAN INTERNATIONAL OVERSIGHT IN FRAGILE STATES PREVENT STATE COLLAPSE OR PERPETUATE NEOCOLONIALISM?

Overview:

The UN Trusteeship System was established following World War II to help colonial trust territories transition to independence or self-government. It imposed international oversight on certain regions until their citizens were able to exercise their right to self-governance. The system eventually accomplished its initial goal, and in 1994 the Trusteeship Council decided to halt operations.

The international community has occasionally assumed an active administrative role in unstable or fallen states since the late 20th century. These missions have included extended multifaceted peace efforts as well as brief transitional governments. The question presently being debated is whether this kind of surveillance protects citizens and stabilizes fragile states, or if it replicates colonial authority and fosters reliance.

Key Terminologies

- **Trusteeship System:** The UN agreement established to oversee trust regions (Chapters XII/XIII).
- **Transitional Administration:** The United Nations or other international organizations that oversee civil administration in a region (such as UNTAET or United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor)



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- **State Collapse:** The loss of central authority and the incapacity to deliver essential services, justice, and security.
- **Neocolonialism:** new kinds of outside influence or control that restrict true sovereignty or perpetuate dependency.
- **Peacekeeping:** several international missions that include tasks related to development, governance, and security.
- **Sovereignty vs sovereignty-sharing:** discussion of international supervision against total state control in situations where a state is unable to protect its citizens.
- **Regional Arrangements:** AU, EU, ECOWAS, ASEAN involvement in interventions or oversight.

Historical Context

An International Trusteeship System was created by the UN Charter after 1945 to oversee former colonies and mandate territories. The goal was to assist regions in achieving independence and self-government. The Trusteeship Council and designated trust areas tasked with carrying out administrative duties under global supervision were part of this structure. The majority of trust territories became independent over several decades, and the Trusteeship Council finished its role.

Trusteeship was intended to be temporary in practice. However, detractors have consistently cautioned that strong governments may utilize "guidance" as a pretext for gaining control. The way trusteeship operated was influenced by the Cold War and decolonization. Newly independent states demanded complete sovereignty and non-interference by the 1960s and 1970s. The UN's move away from formal trusteeship as a mechanism of governance was influenced by that historical push.

Mass crimes, failing states, and overthrown governments were among the new circumstances that the international community had to deal with starting in the 1990s. In response, the UN issued innovative mandates. Examples include UNMIK (United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo), which exercised interim administration under Security Council authority, and UNTAET (East Timor, 1999), where the UN oversaw a large portion of the territory's government as it moved toward independence. These missions combined institution building, civil administration, and security. They were referred to as "midwifing" new states at times.



Current Situation

The international community continues to face a major challenge in the form of fragile and conflict-affected states. Nearly half of the world's extreme poor live in more than 20 nations that are currently categorized as "fragile and conflict-affected situations," according to data from the World Bank and the UN.

Numerous African nations are fragile and frequently experience crises. According to Article 4(h) of the AU Constitutive Act, the African Union (AU) has created instruments for collective response, such as the authority to step in during dire situations. International missions have occasionally received assistance from regional organizations such as ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), which have led operations (such as in The Gambia after 2016).

In Europe, Bosnia and Kosovo continue to serve as benchmarks. Under Security Council Resolution 1244, Kosovo was placed under UN interim administration (UNMIK) in 1999, with significant involvement from NATO and other parties. Security was stabilized by such missions, but local discontent with the foreign presence and unanswered political status issues remained. Reconstruction and governance support are now major functions of Europe's institutions (EU).

One example of a UN transitional administration leading to independence (UNTAET) is East Timor (1999–2002). It demonstrates how institutions and a route to statehood may be established through rigorous international management. However, it necessitated significant outside funding and sustained involvement, and local ownership differed among industries.

When clan dynamics, local rebels, and weak institutions continue to exist, Somalia demonstrates the limitations of monitoring. With varying degrees of success, international players (UN, AU, and bilateral partners) have experimented with various approaches, including assistance for federal institutions, AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia) /AMIS (African Union Transition Mission in Somalia) /AU operations, and peacekeeping. Additionally, consistent international control is complicated by the geopolitics of the region, which makes sustainable state building challenging.



Compared to the initial trusteeship era, international monitoring today must function in a far more complicated setting. Transnational challenges including pandemics, terrorism, and displacement brought on by climate change have linked fragile states. More and more regional organizations such as the AU, EU, and ECOWAS are taking on responsibilities that were previously thought to be exclusive to the UN.

International and Regional Frameworks

The United Nations Charter is the cornerstone of international supervision. When international peace and security are under danger, the Security Council has the authority to act under Chapter VII. In weak states, this legal foundation has been utilized to approve peace operations and transitional administrations. For instance, UNMIK was founded in Kosovo by Resolution 1244 (1999), which said *The international civil presence... will provide an interim administration for Kosovo under which the people of Kosovo can enjoy substantial autonomy within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.* UNTAET was established in East Timor by Resolution 1272. The UN was granted the power to temporarily govern, restore order, and direct political transition as a result of these resolutions.

Established under Chapters XII and XIII of the Charter, the Trusteeship System was intended to direct trust areas toward independence and self-governance. The Trusteeship Council oversaw the administration of authority, making sure that the progress and rights of the local populace were upheld. After Palau gained its independence in 1994, the system fulfilled its mandate and ceased operations.

The Responsibility to Protect framework, which was accepted at the World Summit in 2005, is another important framework. According to the agreement's para 138, *Each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity.* It is the collective duty of the international community to act through the UN when a state is incapable or unwilling to do so. Since it offers a moral and political rationale for intervention, this idea has been brought up in discussions about international supervision in fragile states.



Additionally, regional organizations offer frameworks that influence supervision. Article 4(h) of the African Union's Constitutive Act permits action in circumstances of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide, making it unique. As seen in Somalia and Darfur, this provides the AU with a solid legal foundation on which to operate, occasionally in collaboration with the UN. In West Africa, ECOWAS has also established crisis response structures, such as collective action in Sierra Leone, The Gambia, and Liberia.

The Common Security and Defense Policy missions are among the stability instruments that the European Union has at its disposal. Following the UN interim administration, EULEX (European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo) was sent to the Balkans to promote the rule of law. The European Union is crucial in maintaining fragile states when UN missions leave, even though it is not an enforcement body like the Security Council.

Lastly, human rights treaties and international humanitarian law continue to be essential foundations. International legal norms, human rights treaties, and the Geneva Conventions must all be followed by oversight missions.

Funding

The main sources of funding for international oversight in fragile states are voluntary donations from donor states, assessed payments to the UN budget, and occasionally regional cost-sharing arrangements. The UN peacekeeping budget, to which all 193 member states contribute according to a predetermined scale, was used to fund UN peacekeeping and transitional administrations, such as UNTAET in East Timor or UNMIK in Kosovo. The majority of these expenses are paid for by wealthier countries, namely the US, EU members, Japan, and increasingly China. The World Bank, bilateral donors, and regional institutions like the European Union and African Union, each of which has its own stabilization and rebuilding finance tools, provide additional assistance. Trust funds are frequently set up to direct monies toward humanitarian assistance, security sector reform, and institution-building. These institutions guarantee that fragile governments have access to the funding required for governance and peacebuilding during transitional times, notwithstanding worries about dependency.



Core Principles

1. Respect for Sovereignty

The international system is based on sovereignty. International supervision ought to be short-term rather than long-term. It should only be employed when the Security Council expressly permits it or when a state is unable to safeguard its citizens. Sovereignty must be restored, not replaced, by missions.

2. Consent and Legitimacy

Oversight should, whenever feasible, be predicated on the approval of the host nation or its acknowledged authority. Consent lessens opposition and lends credibility. Missions may find it difficult to function without agreement and risk being accused of neocolonialism.

3. Local Ownership and Participation

If locals are not included, peace cannot endure. Oversight needs to swiftly shift tasks and establish local institutions. Planning has to involve women's organizations, youth, and civil society. Ownership contributes to sustainability and establishes legitimacy.

4. Protection for Civilians and Human Rights

Protection is the main goal of monitoring. Upholding international humanitarian law, preventing mass crimes, and ensuring the safety of people must be the top priorities for missions. Any mandate must include accountability, justice procedures, and human rights monitoring.

5. Clear mandates and exit strategies

Mandates must be quantifiable and exact. Conditions for withdrawal and progress benchmarks must be part of the oversight. Missions run the risk of turning into semi-permanent administrations in the absence of exit plans. East Timor exemplifies the importance of having a clear route to independence.

6. Coordination and partnership

UN missions ought to collaborate closely with local actors, bilateral funders, and regional organizations. Confusion and duplication are avoided by coordination. Political legitimacy and local knowledge are frequently brought by regional groups. Two excellent examples of these collaborations are the AU and ECOWAS.



7. Impartiality and neutrality

Oversight needs to be objective. Favoring one side or group exacerbates conflict and diminishes credibility. Missions that maintain neutrality are better able to mediate disputes fairly and promote peace.

Case Studies

East Timor (UNTAET, 1999–2002) -- The UN created the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) in 1999 to oversee the region and help it achieve independence in the wake of the violence. The mission included institution building, civil administration, and security. Although there were still issues with long-term governance, it was successful in creating an independent Timor-Leste in 2002. This is frequently used as an example of a transitional government that works.

Kosovo (UNMIK, 1999 onward) — Resolution 1244 of the Security Council authorized NATO's deployment in Kosovo and placed it under UNMIK, or interim UN administration. Although UNMIK established structures, local disputes and political status remained unresolved. Later, in 2008, Kosovo proclaimed its independence; however, several states continue to dispute its status. This demonstrates how deeper political conflicts cannot be resolved by international administration, but they can be stabilized.

Liberia (UNMIL, 2003–2018) — Following two civil conflicts, UNMIL (United Nations Mission in Liberia) backed elections, security sector reform, and disarmament. The mission contributed to the reconstruction of national institutions and the creation of a recovery space. 2018 saw UNMIL disband following a protracted engagement. It demonstrates how lengthy and resource-intensive successful state recovery is.

Somalia (AU/UN involvement, AMISOM/ATMIS, and UN support) — Since 1991, Somalia has seen ongoing state fragility. UN assistance and regional deployments (AMISOM, now ATMIS) have occasionally assisted in driving extremist organizations back and made certain government advancements possible. However, the limitations of external supervision in the absence of profound, locally recognized political solutions are demonstrated by ongoing insurgency, clan division, and outside intervention.



Challenges in the Implementation and Enforcement

1. Legitimacy and Local Acceptance:

Legitimacy is one of the most significant obstacles. International oversight is frequently perceived by local populations as being imposed from without. Missions may not have widespread domestic support, even if they are approved by the UN Security Council. When administration is run by outsiders, it might feel like a loss of sovereignty because people desire to make their own decisions. This erodes confidence and occasionally sparks demonstrations against the mission.

2. Political divisions in the Security Council:

The majority of foreign missions are approved by the UN Security Council. On whether and how to act, however, its members frequently disagree. Permanent members favor interventions in certain situations while using their veto authority to thwart action in others. Fairness is called into doubt by this selective approach. Then, rather than serving as platforms for collaborative peacebuilding, fragile states turn into theaters for big-power competition.

3. Resource and Capacity Gaps:

Long-term dedication, staff, and financial resources are needed for international oversight. Although donor countries often offer short-term funding, peacebuilding takes decades. There are also few civilian expertise in administration, justice, and governance. Early mission resource depletion leaves reforms unfinished and increases the likelihood of collapse upon withdrawal. Haiti and Liberia demonstrate how brittle progress is in the absence of steady assistance.

4. Complex Local Dynamics:

Ethnic divisions, clan politics, militias, criminal organizations, and regional meddling are some of the many conflict layers that fragile states frequently deal with. Seldom do international actors fully comprehend these relationships. They could inadvertently favor one side or find it difficult to resolve disputes between rivals. This is demonstrated in Somalia, where local conflicts and extremist organizations continue to erode central authority even after years of backing.



5. Risk of Dependency and Neocolonialism:

The possibility that oversight will lead to dependency is another difficulty. Local institutions do not develop if security, elections, and administration are left to outsiders for an extended period of time. Even with good intentions, this can mimic colonial-style authority. This is referred to by critics as "*neocolonialism*," in which strong states or institutions continue to exert influence over weaker ones in novel ways.

6. Coordination with Regional and International Actors:

Lastly, synchronization is challenging. The same fragile states are frequently served by the UN, AU, EU, ECOWAS, bilateral donors, and NGOs. However, they don't always use the same tactics. Confusion results from competing for influence and overlapping obligations. A lack of unity damages credibility with the host community and decreases efficiency.

The Way Forward: Proposed Measures and Recommendations

In the future, developing national capacity should take precedence over enforcing foreign control in fragile states under international supervision. According to the UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review (2020), "sustainable peace is only possible when societies are inclusive and institutions are resilient." International frameworks must simultaneously implement explicit exit strategies. To prevent foreign engagement from becoming undefined, oversight missions should have clear deadlines and standards for the shift to complete domestic management.

Many Global South states contend that extended oversight or foreign trusteeship run the risk of sustaining unequal power dynamics. African academics and decision-makers, for instance, have denounced interventions in Somalia and Libya as instances of "*neo-trusteeship*," in which outside forces influenced political decisions without getting enough local support. The African Union itself stresses that any international engagement must reinforce rather than supplant African-led solutions. In the past, Caribbean officials have also cautioned that oversight missions may be used by strong countries to regain control over weaker ones.



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Lastly, oversight needs to be open and accountable to the UN as well as the citizens of the state in question. Mechanisms for independent evaluation, reporting, and local consultation help lessen the image of neocolonialism and stop power abuses. The international community can prevent the collapse of fragile governments while upholding their sovereignty and right to self-determination by establishing supervision as a tool of cooperation rather than dominance.

Although self-determination is unquestionably important to international cooperation according to the UN Charter, weak governments frequently find it difficult to achieve stability without outside assistance (UN Charter, 1945). Experiences in South Sudan, East Timor, and Kosovo demonstrate that, if local ownership is disregarded, foreign intervention can both facilitate recovery and lead to new conflicts (UNSC Res. 1244, 1999; UN Secretary-General Report, 2009). In order to foster resilience, strengthen local government, and steer clear of the legacy of colonialism, SPECPOL member states must carefully consider whether monitoring mechanisms may be revised in the future. Building confidence amongst international organizations and ensuring peace without compromising sovereignty must be the main goal.

QARMA

1. How may neocolonialist charges be avoided by designing international supervision mechanisms?
2. How much sovereignty should be preserved when a weak state faces the possibility of disintegrating?
3. What lessons may be drawn from previous UN trusteeship situations like Kosovo and East Timor?
4. In administrations that receive outside assistance, how can local ownership of governance be guaranteed?
5. In unstable states, should regional groups like ASEAN or the African Union take precedence over international actors?
6. How might explicit exit plans and deadlines to prevent long-term dependency be connected to oversight?
7. How might trusteeship-like interventions be guided by the Responsibility to Protect (R2P)?
8. Without compromising regional culture and political identity, how can the UN strike a balance between state-building and peacebuilding?



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