

MUN 2014

Background Guide:

*General Assembly
Fourth Committee on
Special Political and Decolonization*

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
March 14-16, 2014

Letter from the Director

Dear Delegates,

It is a pleasure to welcome you all to MUNI this year, and more specifically, the SPECPOL committee. As one of the Research Directors for MUNI, I hope to deliver an enriching and entertaining experience for you all as you broaden your Model UN skills as well as your general speaking and writing skills in conferences. Along with the other Research Directors, I was responsible for writing the background guides for each committee, and I feel that SPECPOL is a committee that has a purview that covers many little-known issues. A little bit about myself; my name is Anirudh Vedam and I am from Cupertino, California and I am a sophomore at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I actually did not start Model UN until I joined the University of Illinois as a freshman, because Model UN was not offered at my high school. I would have loved to have a Model UN collegiate-like conference when I was in high school. I am confident that this year's MUNI will end up being another big success for both the university and the attendees.

SPECPOL is a special committee in the United Nations because it often deals with issues that are often ignored or not covered deeply enough in the other committee seasons. It often consists of topics that do not clearly fit in one of the other committees. Therefore, many of the topics that fall under SPECPOL's purview include many attributes that one would not always anticipate in a Model United Nations discussion. The broad variety of topics allow for the exploration of topics that fall outside the strict social, political and economic topics that usually permeate the majority of discussions. Topics such as space exploration and mining have elements which usually require a more specific knowledge of the elements behind it.

In our committee, we are going to be focusing on two topics: decolonization in Africa and Kurdish autonomy in Iraq. Both these topics have recent historical events that have affected the issue in some way or another. The Iraq War brought the issue of Kurdish autonomy in Iraq to the forefront of international concern, and brought awareness to an issue that was largely ignored during the initial invasion. The Syrian refugee crisis has also made this a big international issue. The fact that the Kurds reside in an oil-rich region makes it an economic issue along with a political and social one. Their status as a historically subjugated group makes the political and social situation in Iraq more difficult to navigate. It is a difficult task for the UN to defeat centuries of systematic racism. In that way, this topic has a lot in common with the second topic, which is decolonization in Africa. Decolonization in Africa has been helped by the fact that the UN specifically has a committee devoted to making colonies independent and removing the deleterious effects of colonialism. The number of independent countries continues to increase every year. On the other hand, there continues to be many problems that plague the African continent; partially a result of the legacy of colonialism. It is my hope that this committee will be able to find amicable resolutions and find ways to tackle two important issues that will require international cooperation and creative solutions. Best of luck!

Sincerely,

Anirudh Vedam

Topic: Kurdish Autonomy

Brief Overview & History of the Issue

The Kurdish people are an ethnic group based in the Middle East and concentrated in an area known as Kurdistan, which is a region in the countries of Iraq, Syria, Iran and Turkey. While the Kurds do not have their own formal country, they are allowed semi-autonomous rule in Iraq, in a region known as Iraqi Kurdistan.

The issue here is that Kurds in Iraq are often subjugated and marginalized due to their status as a minority in the country. Saddam Hussein's reign in Iraq resulted in the mass killings of many Kurds, as well as their marginalization in the political and economic sphere of influence in Iraq. Due to their status as a marginalized group and their relatively unique culture compared to the other ethnic groups in the area, there has been a movement to establish an independent country for them.

The Kurds are distinct from the other ethnic groups in the Middle East, and therefore have their own language and culture. Throughout history, they have been dominated by other neighboring regions, but they have continued to maintain their cultural practices. For this reason, they feel distinct enough to have their own country in Iraq. Historically nomadic, they became settlers and farmers around the advent of British imperialism. Historically independent, they were forced in with the other ethnic groups during the imperial era and have never got their own country since that point. The Kurdish people have engaged in disputes with the mainly Arab populations of Iraq, Turkey, Iraq and Syria.

Problems Regarding the Issue

Sectarian and ethnic conflicts have continually plagued efforts for Kurdish autonomy. In Turkey and Iraq, Kurds have historically been attacked and ostracized. During the 1980's and the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein of Iraq used gas to kill many Kurds who rebelled during the 1991 uprising. Hussein's party, called the Baathists, had this as a central part of their political philosophy. After Hussein's capture in 2003, Kurds have still been continuing to devote their efforts to the cause of complete autonomy and the establishing of an independent state. However, the increase in power among Kurds after Hussein's capture has caused friction among the majority ethnic groups, and has resulted in Sunni-Shiite al-

liances that are for the purpose of uniting against a perceived Kurdish threat in Iraq. Iraqi political factions now have Arab political groups joining together to unite against future Kurd upheavals or ascensions in power.

Since oil is a major source of income in Iraq, there has been contention over the share of the oil profits that can be accrued by each ethnic group. Arabs have historically had control of oil profits, so the Kurdish people are looking to get a larger share of the profits than they have been getting for centuries now.

The ethnic clashes between the Arabs and the Kurds have also led to burgeoning extremist militia groups, such as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey, which has been named a terrorist group by the United States. Other Kurdish extremist groups include the Al-Qaeda Kurdish Battalions and the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan, which are both Kurdish separatist parties. Some factions of Al-Qaeda have aided Arab groups in Iraq, Syria and other Arab countries against the Kurdish population. The civil war in Syria has resulted in many Kurdish Syrian refugees leaving for Kurdistan and it has also created a power vacuum in Syria that the Kurds wish to fill. Syria has long been led by the Alawite ethnic group minority and the current civil war has propelled many Kurds to look for representation in a country which has long repressed their human rights.

Corrective Action

In the post-Hussein era, the UN has tried finding a permanent, independent home for the Kurds, but has faced obstacles from the Iraqi governments and opposing ethnic groups. The UN has worked with local governments in the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan to try to establish local ties and attempt to set the framework for a new nation. The Kurds of today enjoy a comparatively high amount of foreign direct investment and safety compared to the other regions of Iraq. However, centuries of mistreatment and ethnic clashes between the Kurds and the Arabs make this dispute difficult to solve quickly and amicably. It is the responsibility of the SPECPOL committee to take into account the grievances from both sides and find a solution that makes sure that the Kurds get full political and economic autonomy without removing the rights and safety of Arabs. In the past, support of Turkey and Saudi Arabia in this matter has

proven to be disproportionately favorable to Arabs while ignoring the rights of the Kurds. Leaders of Arab countries should be expected to give some concessions to the residents of Kurdistan because of the centuries of subjugation of the Kurds in many Arab-majority countries.

Since Kurdistan is largely surrounded by an Arab majority, it's important for SPECPOL to continue enforcing rights for Kurds and make sure that violent ethnic clashes and incidences of mass killings of Kurds will not be allowed to happen again. Boundary disputes that have been happening for many years now should be resolved with keeping in mind the history of ethnic and religious conflicts in the region. The province of Kirkuk for example, is an area which has been claimed by Kurds, Iran and Turkey, and it is potentially trouble for a peaceful resolution. The Kurds have argued that it is the ancient capital of Kurdistan and it is rightfully their region. In the past, Kurds have attempted to pass referendums on whether the region is part of their region in the north. The UN on the other hand, has argued that this move would be disastrous for regional stability due to the prospect of ethnic clashes happening again. With the support of the Iraqi government and other Iraqi ethnic groups, the UN has attempted to broker a peaceful compromise. One solution proposed by the UN is to make Kirkuk a normal province in Iraq, which is favored by Arabs. Another solution proposed by the UN is to make Kirkuk a governorate with unique relations to the capital city of Baghdad and Kurdistan itself. Another solution proposed was to make it another autonomous region, and both these solutions are favored by the Turkmen ethnic group. This issue is important to the UN, because failing to resolve this conflict could result in more extremist groups and terrorist spillover to neighboring countries in a similar way to Afghanistan's civil war during the 1980's and 1990's. Already, there are extremist groups vying for control of Kurdistan, and that would quell the rights of the disenfranchised Kurds who are members of a minority religion or who are women. The current Syrian conflict has already had massive negative effects on the region and the people living there. Many of the local Arab tribes and Kurdish extremist groups have already engaged in skirmishes that have negatively impacted the civilians of both parties. It is important for SPECPOL to continue peacekeeping efforts in the region in order to prevent any more extremist groups from negatively impacting the region along with the rest of the world.

Questions to Consider

1. How has the history of Kurds in Iraq impacted the present-day conundrum of securing the Kurds their own independent region while also negotiating with other Iraqi ethnic groups?
2. How can the UN appease the Kurds without giving disproportionate benefits to them at the expense of other ethnic groups in the region?
3. What impact do you think the Iraq War had on the region and the Kurdish independence movement?

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Topic: Neo-colonialism in Africa

Brief Overview & History of the Issue

Decolonization is the reversing of imperial and colonial policies that occurred throughout the latter half of the previous millennium. It has to do specifically with the idea of self-determination, which allows previously subjugated native people and specific ethnic groups to determine their sovereignty and politics without any outside interference. It also seeks to get rid of the arbitrary distinctions between countries and map redrawing that occurred during imperialism, which divided many similar groups and brought together different groups which were historically apart. This has manifested itself in the ethnic and sectarian violence we see in much of Africa today.

The Scramble for Africa was a period of invasion and colonization of Africa during the end of the 19th century until approximately the First World War. During this period, numerous European powers invaded the African continent and exerted economic and political influence in the region by systematic subjugation of the native population and military dominance. The imperial powers viewed Africa as a way for them to secure raw materials and labor for their imperial ambitions. The ethnic and cultural diversity in Africa fostered unrest, which allowed the European powers to exploit this disunity to take over the continent. The clashing imperial powers and constant land and military disputes in the annexed Africa created increased nationalism and distrust among each colonizing nation, which eventually led to excessive jingoism and entangling alliances that crippled any peace efforts. Eventually this culminated in an assassination of a respected Austrian diplomat named Franz Ferdinand, which was the sparkplug for the First World War. Imperialism had many links to the start of the First World War. The Scramble for Africa caused many territorial disputes and encroachment by many different European nations. The Boer War for example, was a war fought between the Boers and the British for control of South Africa. Different territorial disputes in the name of imperialism had the cumulative effect on creating discord between the various imperial European powers. The tangling alliances and militarism that increased as a result of these conquests were a few of the reasons that led to the First World War.

World War I pitted many of the imperial powers against one another, which allowed fledgling independence movements both in Africa and Asia to attract more global attention and garner assistance. Many colonies under the control of imperial powers

helped them in the war as a way to secure their own independence. After the war, the term “self-determination” became more prominent, and it allowed former colonies to assert their independence and get admitted to the UN without being considered a commonwealth or a satellite country. Self-determination allows for new countries to declare their own sovereignty and politics without outside interference from other countries. It also enables equal rights and equality of opportunity in comparison with existing countries. The United States and other members of the Allied forces tended to support the independence movements when it was directly beneficial to them, such as the independence movements in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia. After the Second World War, the Soviet Union and the United States of America emerged as the dominant superpowers of the era, and engaged in a dispute throughout the 1950’s to the late 1980’s known as the Cold War. The need for each nation to have allies and “spheres of influence” resulted in the halt of progress and independence for many colonies that were seeking independence now that the world war was over. The European powers still wanted to keep their old colonies for raw materials and labor, but they were weakened by the war and had less power to stop them. The United States eventually was afraid that many of the newly independent nations would fall under the Soviet sphere of influence, which caused the US and other imperial powers to initiate coups to instill leaders and governments who would fall under their interests. This directly contradicted the ideas of decolonization and self-determination that were immediately espoused by the U.S. in the wake of the Cold War. Because of this, many newly independent countries entered in a non-aligned movement, which in theory, freed them from entangling in America’s or the USSR’s foreign policy but allowed them to maintain amicable relationships with both of them. The fear was that the aid and forcible regime changes initiated by the coups was just another form of imperialism, and this made the newly independent countries wary of any aid or intervention from the former imperial powers. The establishing of the UN gave much more power to these newly independent countries, which were called “third world” countries to differentiate them from the West and the Soviet bloc. During the Cold War, both the Soviet Union and the U.S. wished to establish alliances with countries and instill a similar economic and political system to the ones that both the Soviet Union and the U.S. had. This meant helping

many African countries in the fight for independence post World War 2 as well as setting up friendly governments and helping in independence movements. For example, during the 1958 fight for independence by Guinea from France, the revolutionaries openly courted aid from the Soviets and the eastern bloc. This was because they were angry at the U.S. for engaging in and supporting the British and French imperial ambitions in Africa in the past. Sekou Toure, Guinea's main revolutionary, often played the U.S. and the Soviet Union against each other in order to get more benefited. The threat of newly independent African countries becoming communist often elicited more American aid and it became necessary for both the Soviets and the Americans to expand their respective spheres of influences in Africa.

Problems Regarding the Issue

The arbitrary redrawing of country borders both during the Scramble for Africa the post-independence era in Africa has had devastating consequences for the continent and has hurt decolonization efforts in general. The arbitrary redrawing has often resulted in opposing tribes, ethnic groups or religion being forced to cooperate and live together after being separated for many years. This has caused a lot of sectarian and ethnic violence, which has manifested itself in the Rwandan genocide and general religious conflicts in Somalia and Nigeria. In Nigeria for example, the largely Muslim north and the largely Christian south often engage in violent disputes as a result of religious differences that have existed for hundreds of years. The Rwandan genocide was partially a result of policies that existing during Belgium's colonial rule of Rwanda. The actual genocide was between the minority Tutsi ethnic group and the Hutu majority ethnic group. During the colonial period, the Belgian-controlled Rwanda was controlled partially by the minority Tutsi monarchs, which angered the majority Hutu. When the Hutu regained power after Rwanda became independent, they started subjugating the Tutsi in the same way the Tutsi and the Belgians did to the Hutu during the colonial period. The Rwandan Genocide was the systematic slaughter of the Tutsi by the Hutu. The colonial era in Africa robbed the continent of much of its natural resources and raw materials. The constant subju-

gation of the native people there has also caused a cycle of poverty, which has allowed dictators and other dangerous political figures to rise up and get rid of specific groups in their country. The cycle of poverty has causes in the poor infrastructure, and a lack of education and employment in many African countries along with the rampant malnutrition in many parts of the continent. Systematic racism over many decades of colonial rule has impacted upward mobility and economic ascension.

The Cold War caused former imperial powers to pick sides and want to prevent their former colonies from joining the Soviet Union. By giving aid, and instilling friendly governments, they obstructed the recovery process and continuing to exploit the former colonies for trade and raw materials. The class structure that was established by imperialists has inhibited efforts for equality of opportunity in many areas of Africa.

Current Issues and Corrective Actions

The UN has created special committees to address the aftermath of colonialism and work with African governments to work on decolonizing and removing any remaining vestiges of the colonial era. The UN has created a committee called the Committee of 24 formally named as The Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence of Colonial Countries and Peoples. Established in 1961, this committee is responsible for implementing the decolonization initiative which argues for self-determination for all countries. Since its inception, the UN has helped in the decolonization movement, and as a result, the number of countries that are still considered a colony is a lot smaller than it was at the end of the 2nd World War. Today there are 17 countries that are still considered colonies, with most of them being territories of the United Kingdom or United States. These countries are Western Sahara, Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Monserrat, St. Helena, Turks and Caicos Islands, United States Virgin Islands, Gibraltar, American Samoa, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Pitcairn and Tokelau. The UN has divided territories into one of two categories; “former colonial territories administered by designated member states as UN trust territories pending independence”, or “non-self-governing dependencies or colonies of UN member states.” The SPECPOL committee has continued efforts to reach out to former imperial powers and their colo-

nies to forge amicable solutions to territorial disputes and matters of economic and political hegemony. SPECPOL has attempted to hold fair and free elections in the territories as well as continuing their support of the central tenet of self-determination for all the territories.

Questions to Consider

1. How do you think the events of the Scramble for Africa affected the current decolonization efforts in Africa?
2. Describe how the effects of imperialism in the late 19th and early 20th century set the stage for the current problems in Africa today and how that relates back to the topic of decolonization.
3. What steps should SPECPOL take to address the issues of malnutrition, ethnic and sectarian violence, and education in Africa?
4. How do you think governments in Africa should change in order to address the problems with decolonization?

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