

BACKGROUND GUIDE OF THE SPECPOL



WMIDMUN-XXII

DIRECTOR'S LETTER



Dear Delegates,

It's your director Mark! I am so excited to meet you all during WMIDMUN and I know we'll have a memorable time. Before getting into the topics and facts I figured I could share a bit about myself, my experience with Model UN, and some expectations moving forward in this committee! I'm a current freshman at the College of William & Mary however I was born and raised in Norfolk, Virginia. I first became interested in MUN in my freshmen year of high school after seeing a MUN booth at an activities fair. Later that year I would be participating in my first ever MUN competition at ODUMUNC representing Germany in a SOCHUM committee. Coming to William & Mary I sought out the International Relations Club as a way to meet people with similar interests but also to retain my love for MUN. I plan to double major in International Relations & Philosophy and eventually pursue law school. My dream job would be to work as a lawyer for the UN but I'm honestly open to a lot of career paths. Let's talk about your topics!

Your first topic is foreign influence in the Sahel region. As Western powers withdrew from the Sahel post-colonial era, chaos ensued, with nations struggling for autonomy amid cycles of dictatorship and conflict. Sudan and Chad faced ongoing turmoil. Foreign intervention increased due to economic ties and environmental challenges, exacerbating instability. How should foreign influence in the Sahel be regulated?

Your second topic is linguistic and cultural preservation. Colonialism has led to a noticeable trend of cultural homogenization globally, with language being particularly affected. Interactions between speakers of different languages often give rise to new dialects and languages. As globalization encourages nations to communicate on common terms, rare local languages face decline, with integration often equated to erasure. Indigenous languages are disappearing due to the dominance of lingua franca. This threatens linguistic and cultural-historical ties. How can SPECPOL safeguard linguistic and cultural diversity?

I hope you guys are excited about the committee! I look forward to seeing your unique stances on these complex topics!

Best,
Mark Cole

HISTORY OF THE COMMITTEE



Background:

The Special Political and Decolonization committee (SPECPOL) was established as the 4th committee of the UN General Assembly. This means it serves as one of the 6 main committees of the U.N. giving it increased budgetary and political importance, as well as the ability to help set the agenda of the UN. SPECPOL started as the decolonization committee, addressing issues related to decolonization and newly independent nations. In this role, the committee had the power to manage peacekeepers, make decisions on UN trust territories, and address post colonial disputes. SPECPOL was created in 1993 as a combination of the decolonization committee and the Special political committee. This combination was in part to maintain the relevance of the committee after all U.N trust states gained full independence. The mandate of SPECPOL is to help address the lingering effects of colonialism, and address the myriad of issues that colonialism left across the world. Since 1993, SPECPOL has grown into one of the more important bodies of the U.N. encompassing issues as diverse as Neocolonialism, Space rights, and peacekeeping operations.



BACKGROUND 1.0



Topic 1: Foreign Influence in the Sahel (Coup Belt)

Precolonilism:

Lying between the Sahara desert in the north and the Sudanian savanna in the South, the Sahel region of Africa crosses close to 10 countries, stretching from coast to coast in north-central Africa. The Sahel is the home of many historical African empires such as the Mali empire, the Ghana empire, and Songhai empire. Each of these states left significant impacts on not only Western Africa, but the greater Mediterranean with the region acting as a major source of natural resource, notably gold. The most clear example of this influence is the travels of Malian king Mansa Musa, colloquially said to have caused inflation in many of the regions he visited, due to the amount of gold he spent on his voyages. Due to its proximity to Europe, the western Sahel was one of the first regions of Africa to have major contact with European explorers.

Colonialism:

Between 1450 and 1900, the Sahel was almost completely colonized and occupied by European nations, with France and the United Kingdom holding the majority of the region. This has left a lasting influence on the region, influencing language, culture, and post independence relations. European colonialism of the region was fueled primarily on the abundance of natural resources present, with rubber, oil, and gold fueling European war economies in both world wars. In addition the Sahel was one of the primary victims of the Atlantic slave trade, bearing numerous scars from the horrors of slavery. The slave trade created the power vacuum that allowed for European countries to colonize the region, leading to the lasting influence exerted now.

Post colonialism:

Post colonialism left the Sahel region in chaos, with much of the region struggling to gain full independence, relying heavily on British and French influence. Violence broke out across the region, worsening the situation. Notably Sudan and Chad had significant conflict post independence, both colonial and border disputes between other nations. This instability has led to heavy foreign influence over the region, with much of the region's currencies directly tied to the European market, removing the ability to perform Monetary policy and comparatively weakening the economies of the Sahel. Additionally, political instability has worsened an environmental crisis caused by the expansion of the Sahara and shifting weather patterns. This has created a worsening period of drought and famine, creating a cycle of political instability. Private corporations such as Nestle have also increasingly exploited corruption and instability to gain massive influence over the regions.

BACKGROUND 1.0



Key actors:

France: As one of the major former colonial powers in the region, the French still maintain a major influence over the Sahel region. This is most clearly shown in Francophone countries, including Mali, Guinea, and Senegal. The French also have established a significant military presence in the region, meant to promote stability and combat extremism. However, many countries in the Sahel have resisted this French influence and military action, calling it a form of Neocolonialism, with several countries. Notably Burkina Faso and Niger in 2023 experienced military led Coups, focused on expelling French influence on the region.

ECOWAS: The economic community of West African States is a regional economic and political union spanning across West Africa, meant to create independence and self-sustainability among its member states. ECOWAS also serves as an African led peacekeeping force in the region, intervening at an increasing rate. ECOWAS has a primary goal of economic integration, though it has grown into a major political force in the region, putting pressure on military juntas in Burkina Faso and Mali, resulting in Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso leaving the organization.

China: Pioneering its Belt and Road Initiative, China has massively stepped up investment across Africa, targeting rare earth minerals such as nickel, cobalt, and lithium. This investment can provide a lifeline for impoverished regions of these nations, but high levels of corruption, predatory loans, and governmental instability have led to Chinese investment backfiring for the receiving nation. Thus resulting in significant Chinese influence and control over major industries, reducing the economic benefit that rare earth metals can provide.

Russia: Increasingly cut off from a vast majority of the world, Russia and private military contractors associated with Russia have provided significant political and economic support to embattled regimes. However, this support comes at a cost, with exploitative mining deals and significant political concessions coming in association with Russian economic and military aid.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How should foreign influence be reduced in the Sahel region?

What steps should be taken to increase self-reliance?

How can measures be taken to increase human rights protection in the Sahel?

BACKGROUND 2.0



Topic 2:Linguistic and Cultural preservation

Background:

One of the most prominent effects of colonialism is the homogenization of culture and language worldwide. The increased connection between various regions of the world, resulting from colonialism and globalization, has resulted in a decline in local languages: many choose to integrate in larger cultures, resulting in a loss of cultural identity globally. This is not just seen in language, but in art, dance, cuisine, and all aspects of culture.

The effects of colonialism can be felt in many ways, with one of the most prominent effects being cultural and Language integrations. This is seen with many European languages being among the world's largest languages. For example, Globally there are 220 Million French speakers, with close to half living in Africa alone. 486 million people speak Spanish globally, with Mexico being the largest spanish speaking country. Brazil is the largest Portuguese speaking country, and English is widely spoken across the globe. This proliferation of language and culture has resulted in some regions being left behind, with languages and culture being forgotten, for example Indigenous language in the United states. The Navajo language, critical for U.S war efforts, has only around 170,000 speakers globally, even with significant investment into language learning. Indonesia, home to hundreds of languages, has seen increasing difficulty in maintaining cultural distinctiveness, while also reading standardization of business and language. Overall, the advent of globalization has led to degradation of cultural identity globally, with many aspects of linguistic and cultural historical ties slowly fading away in the face of cultural hegemony.

Case study:

Quebec:

Approximately 92% of the population of Quebec speaks French, with the region experiencing significant French influence from the colonialism era. After British occupation and integration of Quebec, major efforts were made to establish English as the only official language. The first protections for French were created in 1867, with the passage of the British North America act. This guaranteed bi-lingualism in law, but not in practice. Over the next 100 years, Quebec got increasingly excluded from Canadian politics and economic development, with Quebequoites having a 35% lower income rate compared to English speaking Canadians. French Canadians outside of Quebec faced discrimination over cultural and linguistic differences. In the 1960s, a period of reform, known as the "Silent revolution" spread sweeping cultural and economic changes across Quebec. These changes included significant steps to preserve the Quebec national identity and the French language overall. This resulted in significant revitalization of Quebecois identity, with much of Quebec adopting in the next decade laws requiring bilingualism across quebec. However these steps have been challenged with English speaking Canadians and Quebecois Canadians arguing over the importance of Bilingualism and the use of French as a lingua franca across Quebec.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How can local efforts be included in efforts to preserve linguistic diversity?

What can be done to promote cultural distinctiveness?

How can idiosyncratic culturalism be preserved in the face of globalization?

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