



Royal Model United Nations
2026

SPECPOL

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LETTER FROM THE SECRETARIAT

Dearest participants of ROYMUN'26,

It is the greatest honor to welcome you to the first edition of Royal Model United Nations 2026 and our SPECPOL committee.

While shaping the ideas from the very beginning, our main goal was to ensure an extensive experience with both academic and organisational perfection.

In this prestigious committee, you will be raising impeccable ideas, debating about the current and the upcoming process, building new structures and turning the non-integrated actions and solutions to a masterpiece. Your board members will be guiding you to reach perfection in any situation.

While preparing, you will be discovering every single step about your topic and you may even find yourself in the middle of this sequence of events. It will be clear that you embrace your role in the committee.

Keep in mind that every speech you deliver, every motion you give, every question that you ask will gain a new perspective for everyone. The key point is to remain active and work confidentially while shaping the decision-making process with your colleagues.

As the Secretary-General, I am impatiently waiting to see your intelligent work and looking forward to sharing this royal experience with you.

Sincerely,
Imge Belgin
Secretary-General of ROYMUN'26



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LETTER FROM THE CHAIRBOARD

Dear Delegates,

It is our utmost pleasure to welcome you to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL) for ROYMUN'26. We are Defne Kurçenli and Yusuf Altuğ Lokman, and we will have the honor of serving as your board members together with our academic assistant, Duygu Cemre Taşatan. Naturally, we would like to express our deepest gratitude to the honorable Secretariat of ROYMUN'26 for their kind invitation and a warm welcome.

Our agenda item, "Determining the Legal Status and Self-Determination Rights of Non-Self-Governing Territories", guides you to come up with diplomatically appropriate solutions to make the world recognize the oppression faced by the people of territories where the progress of self-determination remains incomplete. Throughout the conference, you are asked to engage in debates and propose solutions collaboratively. The debate may lead you to disagree on certain topics, but remember that it is when you are taking a brave step forward and expressing your thoughts.

This study guide provides all the necessary information you are required to be aware of beforehand. Since our agenda is an agenda with a longstanding history, it needs to be examined layer by layer, and with this guide, we aimed to collect data and further elaborate on each topic. Additionally, please do not consider this study guide as a limitation and feel free to do your research.

We wish you the best of luck in your preparations and a socially and academically fulfilling conference! If you have any further questions regarding the study guide, your personal research or the committee in general, please do not hesitate to contact us via e-mail.

We look forward to meeting you,

Defne Kurçenli and Yusuf Altuğ Lokman

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1. Introduction to the Committee: the United Nations General Assembly Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization Committee)

The General Assembly Fourth Committee, also referred to as the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL), was officially established after the merger of the Special Political Committee and the Special Decolonization Committee in 1990. The United Nations have found it necessary to incorporate said previous committees established in the 1940s, in order to be able to create a committee with a broader view of such diverse yet interconnected issues. The Committee contemplates five major topics around the globe, including decolonization, impacts of atomic radiation, information-related inquiries, examination of peacekeeping operations, and an evaluation of special political missions. The significance of this committee lies not only in its dual approach, which emerged after its merger, but also lies in its dedication to ensuring the prosperity, benefits, and well-being of humankind.

2. Introduction to the Agenda Item: Determining the Legal Status and Self-Determination Rights of Non-Self-Governing Territories

The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL) is one of the six main committees of the General Assembly; therefore, the GA has the authority to allocate agenda items to SPECPOL, such as agendas related to decolonization. The decolonization attempts of the UN originate from the statement “equal rights and self-determination of peoples” specified in Article 1 (2) of the Charter of the United Nations. Also in Chapter XI of the UN Charter, Articles 73-74, named the “Declaration regarding Non-Self-Governing Territories”, show the dedication the UN has put to the subject.

The UN Charter Chapter I includes Article 1, which highlights the preservation of human rights regardless of differences, in our case, geographical and political status, while one of the fundamentals of SPECPOL lies within Chapter XI Articles 73-74. They address the constructive pathways in order to ensure the establishment of self-governing bodies in territories under foreign control. These pathways include: economic, social, political and educational assistance to such territories to preserve their culture from further assimilation and protect the public from further abuse of all kinds and also agree on this policy to be respected, not limited to metropolitan areas but worldwide, with the manner of good-neighbourliness respectively.



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Non-Self-Governing Territories are defined as areas whose people have not been able to gain governing authority over the territory. The UN calls it its duty to intervene in any situation that may threaten the principles of the Human Rights Declaration, while also calling for referendums. Calling for a referendum implies that the United Nations requests and hopes for the people of these territories to choose their fate and vote in order to decide their political future. The topic of such referendums may consist of independence, constitutional changes, joining another country, and autonomy.

Decolonization is also dictated to administering power states by creating diplomatic and economic oppression, as well as raising international criticism. In Non-Self-Governing Territories, the future and the structural characteristics of sovereignty are uncertain, leading to economic instability and political crisis. Furthermore, because of their lack of representation, these territories are not being recognised by the Member States; therefore, it is vital to monitor the ongoing situations, bring them to the table to discuss, and find solutions, even if these territories can not participate in international accords.

Furthermore, the Non-Self-Governing Territories are dependent on foreign authorities for their economic surveillance and the defence of the territory. In these cases, the protection of external authorities may demonstrate an innocent approach; however, this situation may lead to the formation of a weakened local will, accompanied by the creation of economic dependence in Non-Self-Governing Territories.

Some territories request to establish their own governing authorities, while others reject the idea of a referendum because of their accepted cultural and economic assimilation or simply because of their fear of being harmed by external powers without the protection of their accustomed administering power state.

Determining the legal status of such territories contains different perspectives; the administering power state may call the Non-Self-Governing Territory its own land, while the United Nations, therefore SPECPOL, considers the territory an area completely apart from its administering state or a province in relation to the state. The United Nations emphasises the Self-Determination rights of these regions and enhances independence, free association, integration and autonomy.



3. Key Terms and Definitions

de jure (from the law): A legal concept that refers to what happens according to the law, as opposed to *de facto*. For example, a *de jure* leader has the legal right to authority over a jurisdiction, but a *de facto* leader is someone who exerts authority without holding the legal right to do so.

de facto (from the fact): A legal concept used to refer to what happens in reality or in practice, as opposed to de jure (“from the law”), which refers to what is actually notated in legal code.

Imperialism: The policy or practice of extending power over foreign nations, usually by force. It involves the exercise of political, economic, and military power to establish control over other lands and peoples, often with the aim of extracting resources and wealth for the benefit of the imperial power.

Merchantilism: The political ideology of minimizing imports and maximizing exports Which was popular between the 16th and 18th century.

Polisario Front: The liberation movement of Western Sahara which is supported by Algeria, fighting against Moroccan Control.

Monroe Doctrine: A United States policy established in 1823, warning Europe about interfering in the political affairs in the Western hemisphere, criticised by seeing it as a form of American Imperialism

Guerilla Warfare: A type of warfare fought by irregulars in fast-moving, small-scale actions against rival insurgent forces, either independently or in conjunction with a larger political-military strategy.

Diaspora: The dispersal of a population from their homeland, frequently due to historical occurrences like migration, war, or the transatlantic slave trade.



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Colonialism: The presence of foreigners who are involved in unequal relationships of dominance and exploitation of indigenous people in an area that is remote from their homeland.

Autonomy: The ability of people or organizations to act independently and make informed decisions without external pressure or influence.

Self-determination: The legal right of individuals to choose their own fate and a fundamental principle of international law. It is acknowledged as a basic legal principle codified in several international treaties.

Referendum: An election used to make a major final decision by the public, who subsequently vote to decide the outcome.

4. Historical Background

When examining titles such as Self-Determination, it is crucial to understand the evolution of pressing issues around the globe and to study the manifestations of each historical term to prevent anachronism. It is mandatory to analyze the chronological background, respectively. This part will emphasize the root causes of concerns regarding the legal status and Self-Determination Rights of Non-Self-Governing Territories and their developmental processes.

4.1. Origins of Colonialism, Its Scope and the Function of the United Nations

As many leading causes of colonialism may be pronounced, it can easily be stated that the action gained its firing power from the geographical discoveries, also known as “The Age of Discovery”, so starting to understand the motives behind these discoveries is of great significance. Over the centuries, Europeans -primarily the Portuguese and the Spanish- have shown efforts to gain access to the Asian trade roads or to create alternative pathways and bypass the land routes controlled by the Ottomans. This economic concern gave rise to the development of a strong navy and marine forces, which subsequently led to the geographical discoveries.



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Shortly after the initial establishment of the first colonies in areas such as the American continent, India, and the Cape of Good Hope, the colonials gained access to various trade routes, which again gained them a large economic profit, along with establishing new ports. Generally, the idea of colonialism has taken its motivation from the thought of controlling administrative forces in distant areas and gaining access to their income and workforce to use for their own benefit.

Access to staples and precious stones has highlighted the colonial race between the colonials since it is thought to show off the prestige, the capability of the colonial's military force and the power over the seas and trade roads among Europeans, notably the United Kingdom and France. Moreover, it was also a way to spread Christianity all across the globe. The word colony was indeed used back around the 15th century; however, the colonials often referred to themselves as the ones bringing civilization to the mentioned distant areas, which is nowadays seen as a Eurocentric ideology.

The people of the colonized areas have struggled to choose their own destiny and fight back against the power that silences them, not only diplomatically but also socially, traditionally and economically. People of these lands were seen as a workforce not for the development of their own lands but for the people occupying their area, who are also suspending them from international recognition, intellectual and economic trade.

After the United Nations was established in 1945, the self-determination rights of each land have become a fundamental principle of international law. The UN has established a Non-Self-Governing Territories list, requiring administering powers to report to the UN periodically and to speak up about the referendums frequently while fully supporting the independence of such territories. As mentioned before, the UN has taken measures in the UN Charter Chapter XI and the General Assembly Resolution 1514 (1960) that focus on the self-determination rights of any and all people.



4.2. Decolonization after the Second World War

It is widely believed that decolonization efforts began after the establishment and encouragement of the United Nations; however, it was only an accelerator; the main reason was the aftermath of the Second World War, which had shaken the foundations of colonization. The Second World War was a global conflict that took place between 1939 and 1945. In many respects, it is considered the continuation of the First World War after a 20-year pause. The war had two main blocs: the Axis Powers, consisting of Germany, Italy and Japan, and the Allies, consisting of France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, China and the United States. It has concluded with the victory of the Allies, yet the war has affected both the Allies and the Axis Powers terribly.

After the Second World War, the European economic potential and military force had weakened. Prior to the war, nations like Great Britain had colonies all around the globe, making it the largest colonial empire at the time. France was colonizing Northern Africa, and the Netherlands was gaining control over Indonesia. By the end of the war, the cities were destroyed, the industrial production had decreased, the nations were crushed under huge debts, and millions of soldiers were lost. These outcomes have made it impossible for the nations to continue controlling the colonies, as per say, it was getting harder for the United Kingdom to continue deploying soldiers and control the local administration of India.

Furthermore, the war has made it clear that the European nations can, in fact, be defeated, and this situation has made the people of the colonized lands become more confident in determining their own fate instead of letting another nation decide. During the resolution process of the Second World War, the right of Self-Determination, democracy and independence were being discussed in countless conventions, which once again revived the idea of uprising against external control. There were definitely people standing against the colonial movements occurring in their own lands, but only after the Second World War that they have achieved to form larger mass movements. Some colonies have managed to gain independence with peace and diplomacy; on the other hand, for others, it required more.



4.3. The Outcomes of the Cold War on Self-Determination and Decolonization

Before 1945, the establishment of the United Nations, Self-Determination was observed as a diplomatic idea or a moral principle. The gradual gain of independence of African and Asian colonies and their current representation and predominance in the UN have led to the adoption of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV), marked by its recognition of the people's rights of self-determination. Therefore, the Cold War period is thought to be the period when self-determination became one of the fundamental norms of international law.

The Cold War has indeed accelerated the decolonization process since the main actors, such as the United States and the Soviet Union, intended for the European states not to continue their colonial actions, considering the economic profits they may gain from the colonies and the harm it does to international law and the terrible sociological and democratic outcomes.

The Soviet Union has adopted an approach that considers colonialism as an extension of imperialist capitalism; therefore, the Soviet Union has advocated for the independence of such colonies and has declared that colonial rule is an administration that is damaging to the principles of humanitarian law. The United States believed that colonialism and the rise of colonial empires might cause instability. Besides, the United States had a motive to prevent the states that were yet to gain their independence from being influenced by the Soviet Union.

Long before the Cold War, the lack of Self-Determination was thought to be an internal problem for the territory that was being controlled, but a legitimate issue of the international community. After 1960, the United Nations have started to strictly monitor the Non-Self-Governing Territories, support referendum efforts or even call for them and established various decolonization committees.



Aside from the positive outcomes, the Cold War has also caused negative effects on the decolonization process, so it is crucial to know the pivotal influence of the Cold War, even if it is being omitted by the majority of debaters. The ideal of Self-Determination has not always been in accord with the geopolitical interests of nations around the world. The independence movement has turned into a contest where the question was not whether the people of the land would be able to gain independence, but whether support from the United States or the Soviet Union would win. This race between dominating powers has taken the movement away from its scope and aim, leading to further damage to the people of the area. One of the negative outcomes may be pronounced as the dilemma of self-determination and territorial integrity. If each ethnic group were to separate from the mainland, encouraged by the self-determination principle, that would cause frequent divisions resulting in civil wars.

4.4. The Rise of Modern Non-Self-Governing Territories

The main question of this topic is whether the world has managed to widely achieve decolonialism, and if so, why are there still Non-Self-Governing Territories present? Today, the United Nations recognizes 17 NSGTs consisting mainly of smaller in size island regions and areas of disputed sovereignty. The rise of Non-Self-Governing Territories is the result of an incomplete decolonization process, since in certain regions, there was a lack of consensus on independence, debates on sovereignty, and strategic interests were at stake.

In several regions, another reason for the rise of modern Non-Self-Governing Territories has arisen: the conflict of self-determination and sovereignty, a situation in which two unique and crucial rights coexisting might also lead to the destruction of the main goal or cause further problems. According to the Self-Determination Principle, each sociological or ethnic group, if requested, has the right to determine its own fate by choosing its own administration, and according to the Territorial Integrity Principle, each administration has the right to express its sovereign territory. However, as occurs in the Western Saharan region, the ethnic group demands self-determination while the nation claims sovereignty.

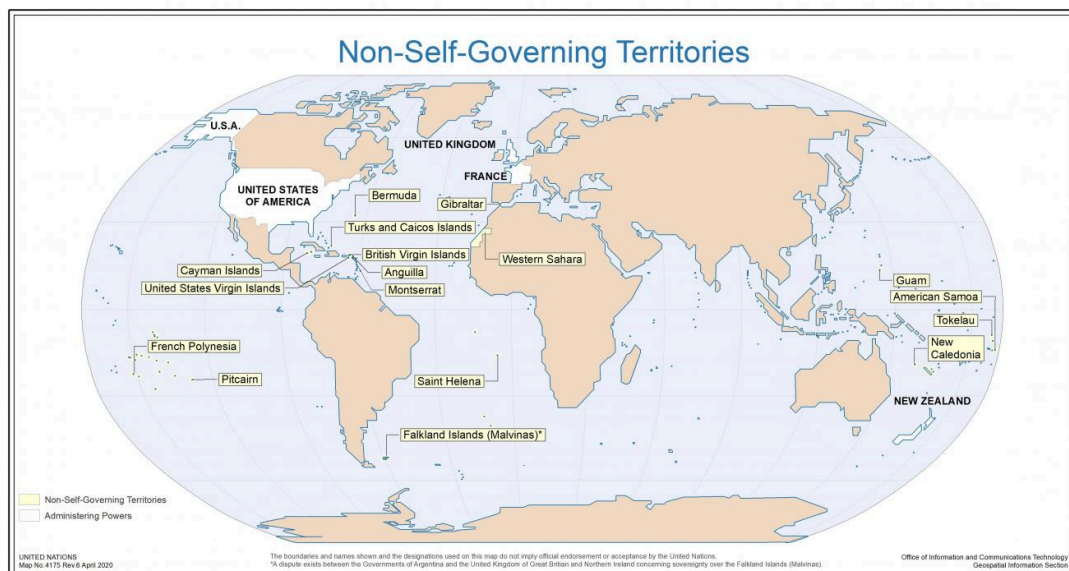


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The United Nations promotes the ideal of holding referenda since it is an expression of the will of the people in NSGTs, it helps provide peaceful solutions instead of violence, and it is a legislative procedure that answers the question of self-determination. However, it can not always be performed because in some regions, disagreements over voter lists, such as whether to include or to exclude the immigrants, issues regarding the security of the vote and the area and political disputes are faced. Furthermore, in certain areas, the administering powers struggle to return the mandate to the people since they wish to continue benefiting from their ports, strategic geopolitical location, military bases, and natural resources, as was the case for Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands.

The modern NSGTs differ from the old colonies: they are smaller in population, have greater autonomy, local parliaments and special constitutional provisions. As observed in many modern NSGTs, the people of the land would even prefer to stay controlled by the administering power, which creates a huge controversy around the topic of decolonization. The NSGTs might be more humane and, in some way, more modern, but still, the decolonization process has not been concluded yet, so this political uncertainty and instability lead to economic struggles caused by a lack of investment and rising diplomatic tensions.

In general, the modern Non-Self-Governing Territories are not only what is left from colonialism, but they are up-to-date representations of how the self-determination and territorial integrity principles clash in practice.



Office of Information and Communications Technology Geospatial Information Section. (2020, April 6). Non-Self-Governing Territories [Map]. United Nations



5. Legal, Political, Economic and Social Challenges

The incomplete decolonization results from several diverse elements that further cause the insufficiency of measures and even disturb the appearance of objectively positive outcomes. Examining each element will help us understand the subject more realistically and will surely help us find solutions that approach the subject from a dual perspective.

5.1. The Conflict Between Territorial Integrity and Self-Determination

International Law contains two main principles regarding autonomy and self-determination when dealing with decolonization nevertheless, these main principles might come into conflict with one another in certain regions, and that is when the real conflict arises. Through the years, with the leadership of the United Nations, countless efforts have been made with the aim of encouraging the people of Non-Self-Governing Territories to decide upon their own destiny and call a land their own. Yet on some occasions, the action taken concerning a certain principle of international law resulted in another one being corrupted.

The right of self-determination stands for the people's right to determine the political status of their land, be independent, unite with another land, and establish their own government. The principle that preserves the territorial integrity of nations aids in the fight against the possible fragmentation by secession movements, which may give rise to unstable international systems. The legal challenge originates from the incorporation of these principles in practice. If an NSGT steps forward and wishes to be parted from its administering power and become independent, while the administering power refuses to spare the land and considers it an action taken to fragment its land, the conflict occurs.

Related to this topic, the International Court of Justice published an advisory opinion in 1975. The advisory opinion argues that although there might be a historical relation, that does not constitute proof of sovereignty; therefore, the final decision must be made according to the free will of the people, highlighting the primacy of the right of self-determination.



5.2. Economic Dependency and Related Obstacles such as Exploitation of Natural Resources and Foreign Intervention from a Geopolitical Perspective

When approaching the topic of economic dependency, it is vital to address the interconnectedness. Does the exploitation of natural resources occur because of the economic dependency, or does the economic dependency make it eligible and reachable for exploitation? Notably, it is also observed in a pattern; therefore, the impact of geopolitics shall not be neglected. Moreover, the aftermath of economic dependency leads to further external intervention.

Many of the NSGTs recognized by the United Nations are smaller in population, have narrow local market control, and are dependent on external investments and importation. This is a situation proving that political self-determination does not correlate with economic self-sufficiency in these cases. It is fair to say that these areas are only theoretically independent; the lack of economic surveillance puts them in a fragile situation that depends on the economic aid coming from external powers, specifically the administering powers, which results in the necessity of economic concessions to be given. So the main question here is not whether the NSGT could be independent, but whether it could remain independent?

Exploitation of natural resources is one of the pressing concerns when it comes to this topic. As we observe the NSGTs, almost all of them have a wide variety of natural resources and are unable to utilize these resources, presumably because of economic concerns, a harsh environment that requires access to technology and economic capacity. The inability of the people of these territories to make use of their resources results in external authorities taking advantage of them. An International Law principle has developed in conjunction with decolonization movement, referred to as the Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources principle, demonstrating its standing with the people of the NSGTs and its opposition to the exploitation of resources by external powers during the colonial period. It advocates for the rights of the people of the NSGTs to have permanent sovereignty over the natural resources of their own land. If the modern NSGT is yet to be independent, who is to utilize the oil, mining revenues, fishing profits, and energy deals?



From a geopolitical perspective, most of the NSGTs are located in critical sea lanes, military bases, energy corridors and centers for natural resources; therefore, while some nations are advocating for the self-determination principle, others are arguing against it. It is widely believed that, in regions that possess geopolitical significance, even with political independence, they will struggle with inevitable long-term dependency resulting from the influence of foreign companies and external pressure if they have a weak economic capacity.

5.3. Legitimacy of Referendums and Challenges on International Recognition

Before discussing the legitimacy of referendums, it is only fair to first address the reasoning behind why referendums are being called. The necessity for referendums to take place is not solely the need to answer the question of independence and self-determination, but also the social motives lying behind. The first reasoning that comes to mind when addressing the issue is the ideal to preserve the cultural identity of the people of the region, in which they perceive themselves as a culturally or ethnically distinct population from the dominant population of the administering power because of their differences in language, religion, history and traditions. Moreover, because of these core differences of the unrecognized population, they suffer from a lack of international representation, and therefore, self-determination becomes a fundamental necessity. Another reason might be the demand to at least symbolically correct the historical injustices they have faced for decades. Furthermore, referenda emerge in cases of human rights concerns regarding their cultural and traditional education rights.

Referendums are the main tool to put a stop to topics that might raise public controversy, such as self-determination and are referred to as the most democratic way to determine the political future of the people. A typical referendum taking place in the context of decolonization and NSGTs goes through several stages: the initiation of the self-determination request, the validation stage, in which the UN plays a huge role, the official call for the referendum, voting, the international recognition of the results, and implementation. One of the questions that must be addressed concerning these stages is who is to vote. The people living in the territory where the referendum will take place might not only include the ethnically distinct people asking for the referendum, but it may also include immigrants, refugees, and diaspora, apart from the indigenous people. Therefore, to determine who is to vote is one of the most important questions regarding the topic.



In several cases, even if the referendum had taken place and it came out in favour of the self-determination of such territory, there still may be no practically realistic independence entertained. Various nations conceive that self-determination does not automatically create a right to secession; accordingly, that might further cause international recognition problems.

6. Previous International Instruments, Legal Principles, Doctrines and Their Limitations

6.1. United Nations Trusteeship Council

United Nations Trusteeship Council (UNTC) was established in 1945 to help ensure that trust territories were administered in the best interests of their inhabitants and of international peace and security. Those trust territories were placed under the International trust system. The main goals of the International Trusteeship System were to promote the advancement of the inhabitants of Trust Territories and their progressive development towards self-government or independence.

some of the Trust territories were:

- The territory of Nauru, under Australian Control
- Territory of New Guinea, under Australian Control
- British Cameroon
- French Cameroon
- Trust territories of the Pacific Islands, Under the control of the United states, which included current UN members of Marshall Islands, Palau, Micronesia; and US commonwealth Northern Mariana Islands

The aims of the Trusteeship System have been fulfilled to the extent that all Trust Territories have attained self-government or independence, either as separate States or by joining neighbouring independent countries

The Trusteeship Council is made up of the five permanent members of the Security Council: China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States. Trusteeship Council is authorized to examine and discuss reports from the Administering Authority on the political, economic, social and educational advancement of the peoples of Trust Territories and, in consultation with the Administering Authority, to examine petitions from and undertake periodic and other special missions to Trust Territories.



The council suspended its operations in The Trusteeship Council suspended its operations on 1 November 1994, a month after the independence of Palau, the last remaining United Nations trust territory. By a resolution adopted on 25 May 1994, the Council amended its rules of procedure to drop the obligation to meet annually and agreed to meet as occasion required -- by its decision or the decision of its President, or at the request of a majority of its members or the General Assembly or the Security Council.

6.2.UNGA resolution 1514

UNGA resolution 1514 was adopted on December 14, 1960. This resolution, also known as The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, affirmed independence for people living under colonial rule.

The idea of adopting a declaration of decolonization was first proposed by the Soviet Union. However, to prevent possible crises of the colonies that would have massive administrative changes, this issue was later brought to the United nation to be resolved.

In this declaration, foreign rule was seen as a violation of human rights. It was mentioned that All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

When adopting this resolution, 89 countries voted in favour, none voted against, and nine abstained: Australia, Belgium, Dominican Republic, France, Portugal, Spain, Union of South Africa, United Kingdom, and United States; many of which had colonies at the time.

This declaration has become a milestone in the decolonization process. For the 40th anniversary of the Resolution, UNGA adopted resolution 55/146, declaring the decade 2001-2010 the Second International decade to eradicate colonialism.



7. Analysis of the Ongoing Situation, Major Stakeholders and Blocs

7.1. Former Colonial Authorities: United Kingdom, France, Morocco United Kingdom

The British empire became the largest empire in the world by the late nineteenth century, encompassing territories across Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas and Oceania. Merchantilist Policies, which are designed to maximize exports and minimize the imports and accumulate the wealth in forms of precious metals, have been the motivation of British colonialism that began in the late 16th century.

By 1870, there was a new surge in expansionist policies in England. The European powers determined to divide Asia and Africa, and during the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, various European empires set guidelines for claiming territories. The economic crisis of 1873 and the resulting wave of protectionism that overtook European markets caused Britain to rely increasingly on its colonies. Patriotic sentiment in Britain grew inextricably tied to the new economic pressures, giving way to intense nationalism. By the early twentieth century, the British Empire had expanded to include Egypt and Sudan, forming arguably the most extensive empire that the world has ever known.

Various types of colonies were developed by the British Empire: The British Empire developed several types of colonies, including ports or trading posts, such as Hong Kong; commercial production colonies, as in present-day Sierra Leone and the Gambia; plantation colonies, as in present-day Honduras and Guyana; and dominions, such as Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, each of which had a large white population and thus was granted a greater degree of autonomy within the empire. British India, which was home to a large population of potential workers and had numerous natural resources, was known as the jewel in the crown of the British Empire.

Currently, the UK's main policy is that Overseas territories are self-governing by choice, officially stating that if the population lives as a British non-self-governing territory, they will be granted the right to govern themselves.

10 Of the Current 17 non-self-governing territories are governed and controlled by the United Kingdom: Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, Pitcairn Islands, Saint Helena, and Turks and Caicos Islands



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France

French colonialism started in the 16th century. A distinction is generally made between the "first French colonial empire", that existed until 1814, by which time most of it had been lost or sold, and the "second French colonial empire", which began with the conquest of Algiers in 1830.

The motivation behind French colonialism was the so-called "Civilizing mission" which aimed to spread French language, values, traditions and institutions. In the beginning, the French focused primarily on the Americas and the Caribbean, however most of those territories were lost after the Seven Years' war.

Administratively, the colonies were governed under unequal judiciary systems and rarely granted full French citizenships, despite the universalist policies of the French Empire. Even though the access to citizenship or education was better compared to colonies under different colonial powers, efforts for the extension of republican institutions mostly failed, facing both internal divisions and widespread refusal by colonized populations to fully submit to the laws of the French Republic.

Currently, 2 of the 17 non-self-governing territories are under French rule: French Polynesia and New Caledonia.



Morocco

The case of Morocco is quite different from the other colonial powers, since it was also a French and a Spanish colony at the beginning, and currently controls Western Sahara as a Colonial Power.

The French conquest of Morocco began with the French Republic occupying the city of Oujda on 29 March 1907. After French control, The Spanish Protectorate in Morocco was established on 27 November 1912 by a treaty between France and Spain that converted the Spanish sphere of influence in Morocco into a formal protectorate.

Currently, 70% of Western Sahara is controlled by Morocco and the remaining 30% is controlled by the Sahrawi liberation movement called the Polisario Front.

On the 31st October 2025, The United Nations Security Council(UNSC) adopted a resolution, stating that genuine autonomy for Western Sahara under Moroccan sovereignty could be the most feasible solution to Rabat's 50-year conflict with the Algeria-backed Polisario Front. Russia, China and Pakistan abstained, while Algeria did not vote. The remaining 11 council members voted in favour of the resolution, which also renewed for one year the mandate of the UN peacekeeping force in Western Sahara, known as the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).



BBC. (2020, November 18).
Western Sahara territory [Map].

BBC



7.2. Anti-Colonial Bloc: Algeria, Cuba, Venezuela

Algeria

Algeria was one of the first actors that started a revolution against Colonial powers. Revolution, led by the National Liberation Front (FLN) started in 1954 and ended after Algeria gained independence in 1962, after 132 years of French Colonial rule.

Algeria's revolution was not only pivotal for its own people but also served as a beacon for anti-colonial movements across the world. The success of Algeria's independence encouraged other nations, from Angola to South Africa, to challenge colonial powers and assert their sovereignty. Gaining independence, however, did not mean an end to Algeria's challenges. The legacy of colonialism left the country economically devastated with much of its infrastructure destroyed. Algeria's initial post-independence policies focused on reconstruction. The newly recovered sovereign nation strove to balance its revolutionary and patriotic values with the need to modernize and stabilize its economy. With the 11th largest proven natural gas reserves globally, the hydrocarbon sector served as the backbone of Algeria's post-independence recovery.

Cuba

Colonialism, imperialism and anti-imperialism have been decisive in shaping Cuban history for hundreds of years. Spain took possession of Cuba as a colony in 1492. For Cubans, building an independent nation and mapping out a development path have been fundamental goals that could only be achieved through a national project that includes coping with the problem of dependence-independence. The presence and vested interests of European colonial powers and the emergence of the United States as a regional and global power marked a sequence of domination, resistance, revolution and conflict.

Interest in controlling Cuba was reinforced by the existence of a sugar industry that by the 1820s had surpassed all competitors. In parallel, the United States became Cuba's fundamental trade partner. A network of US companies were formed to operate with and on the island. Thousands of US citizens established residence in Cuba as investors, traders and corporate representatives, increasingly influencing the island's economy and augmenting Cuba's importance for US elites. However, an overwhelming majority of Cubans started to feel left behind, and controlled by that small group of elites, which became the motivation for anti-imperial movements and revolution as an end product.



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The Cuban revolution began in hopes of overthrowing the right-wing dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. After the 1952 Cuban coup d'état, in which Batista overthrew the emerging Cuban democracy and consolidated power with financial military and logistical support of the USA.

The revolution began in 1953 and lasted until 1959. Batista fled Cuba on the 1st of January, 1959 and revolutionary guerilla forces led by Fidel Castro took control of the capital city, Havana.

Castro rapidly nationalized US-owned land and businesses, causing the USA to respond with trade restrictions and breaking diplomatic ties and Cuba being isolated from the United States; which caused Cuba to search for other partners for military aid and potential sugar market. This Search was finalized by Cuba strengthening diplomatic ties with The Soviet Union.

The Cuban revolution became important far beyond Cuba for decolonization movements, happening in an era in which decolonization efforts was at its peak. Cuba became the reference for guerilla warfare and post-revolution social reforms, inspiring groups in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Venezuela

Similar to Cuba, Venezuela was also a former Spanish colony. Its anti-imperial roots trace back to the Wars of Independence, happening between 1810 and 1823. Simón Bolivar, which is known as El Liberador(the Liberator) in South America, led a campaign to “retake” Venezuela, which lasted over a decade.

Bolivarianism, which is a left-leaning patriotic ideology named after Simón Bolivar, has been the primary ideology throughout the efforts of gaining independence. It focuses on Latin American economic and political stability, as well as an equitable distribution of South America’s natural resources.

In the contemporary era, Venezuelan Ideology is formed mostly by Bolivarianism, especially after the Bolivarian revolution that began in 1999 by former Venezuelan president, Hugo Chávez. The political and strategical plan was to threaten North American Presence in South America, and Liberation of Latin America from Monroe doctrine, which was primarily focusing on reducing intervention of European colonizers to the Americas, that have been criticized for being a tool to spread the imperialism of the United States over Latin American countries.



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Nicolás Maduro has been another important figure in Modern Venezuelan History. His ideas were shaped by Bolivarianism and he credits the original policies of Hugo Chávez that aimed to reduce poverty and inequality. Even though he was portraying himself as “the man of the people” and “the working-class champion standing against US imperialism”; he is often criticized for dismantling democratic institutions, massive human rights abuses, rampant corruption, and the catastrophic economic collapse of Venezuela. He has been seen as an authoritarian figure during his Presidency.

On the 3rd of January 2026, Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro was captured by US Operations forces. They were flown to the United States to face federal criminal charges. US president Donald Trump and his administration justified the operation as a law-enforcement action, with military support, that the president has "inherent constitutional authority" to undertake.

This capturing, however, was not received as something negative by the majority of Venezuelan People. Surveys indicate that more than 90% of Venezuelans inside the country say they feel grateful to President Donald Trump for removing Nicolás Maduro from power on January 3.

7.3. Related International Organizations: C-24 and ICJ, OHCHR

C-24

C-24 is a United Nations committee that was established in 1961 and is exclusively devoted to the issue of decolonization. In its foundation, it contained 17 member states and additional 7 seats were later added, giving the origin of the name “C-24”, even though it currently has 29 member states.

The committee gathers annually in New York in June, and at each session, the Committee reviews the list of territories to which the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples is applicable and makes recommendations on its implementation and on the dissemination of public information on decolonization to the local population. The committee also reports to Specpol.



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Reportedly, some of the member states have been creating disputes over the qualification of some territories entering the list of non-self-governing territories. These disputes are generally created when countries aim to erase the “colonial label” that may occur when they have territories listed in the non-self-governing territories list. Some examples include:

China struck out Hong Kong and Macao from “colonial territories” in 1972, Also being accused of preventing Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and Tibet entering the List.

United States of America’s prevention of Puerto Rico entering the list of non-self-governing territories, causing Puerto Rico to be reviewed by the C-24 since 1972.

Various organizations including the British delegates claimed that the committee is 'no longer relevant' to the United Kingdom Overseas Territories as many of its member states are colonizers themselves, controlling various territories wanting independence.

C-24 can discuss and recommend whether a territory should be included in the list of non-self-governing territories, but it does not hold the authority to add territories by itself. Through diplomatic consultancy, negotiations with stakeholders are made by C-24, though a legally-binding resolution can not be created.

International Court of Justice (ICJ)

The International Court of Justice is the Judicial body of the United Nations. Its headquarters are situated in the Dutch City The Hague. It settles legal disputes submitted to it by states and provides advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by other UN organs and specialized agencies. The ICJ is the only international court that adjudicates general disputes between countries, with its rulings and opinions serving as primary sources of international law.

The main difference between ICJ and ICC(International criminal court) is that ICJ deals with disputes between bigger entities like countries, whereas ICC is used to penalize individuals with severe crimes like genocides or crimes of aggression. In case of non-self-governing territories, ICJ is the responsible judicial body, since those territories are part of territorial disputes of the nations.

Structurally, ICJ works as an advisory body, not holding the authority to create legally-binding resolutions. However, even though the resolutions do not carry a binding force, they still carry legal, political and systematic weight.



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For the case of non-self-governing territories, there have been several cases where the UN general assembly took the advisory opinions of the court, with direct Landmark-concluded cases or indirect cases for the limited authority of the court. Some examples include:

Western Sahara, through 1075 advisory opinions. On 13 December 1974, the General Assembly requested an advisory opinion about whether Western Sahara is a Spanish territory belonging to no one (*terra nullius*), if not, the ties of Mauritania or the Kingdom of Morocco with the territory. ICJ expressed the opinion that the materials and information presented to it showed the existence, at the time of Spanish colonization, of legal ties of allegiance between the Sultan of Morocco and some of the tribes living in the territory of Western Sahara. On the other hand, the Court's conclusion was that the materials and information presented to it did not establish any tie of territorial sovereignty between the territory of Western Sahara and the Kingdom of Morocco or the Mauritanian entity.

East Timor, which is not a non-self-governing territory anymore, rather a UN-member. East Timor was a Portuguese non-self-governing territory that was invaded by Indonesia in 1975. In 1989 a treaty was signed by Australia and Indonesia that was reportedly exploiting the rich maritime area of East Timor. Portugal sued Australia to ICJ for that treaty (which is known as the East Timor case), arguing that Australia harmed the determination rights of east-Timorese people. After considering the arguments advanced by Portugal, the Court concluded that Australia's behaviour could not be assessed without first entering into the question why it was that Indonesia could not lawfully have concluded the 1989 Treaty, while Portugal allegedly could have done so ; the very subject-matter of the Court's decision would necessarily be a determination whether, having regard to the circumstances in which Indonesia entered and remained in East Timor, it could or could not have acquired the power to enter into treaties on behalf of East Timor relating to the resources of the continental shelf.

Those cases are great examples that demonstrate the authority of ICJ over non-self-governing territories that can also be implemented to similar cases.



Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

For the non-self-governing territories, OHCHR takes a more human rights protection-based approach. The governing rights are not only seen as a bureaucratic process, but rather a realization of human rights.

The right of self-determination is protected under the 1st article of International Covenant on Civil and Political rights: “All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.” This is seen as the core legal Anchor of OHCHR regarding non-self-governing territories and their rights of self-determination.

One of the most effective tools of OHCHR to address non-self-governing territories is the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Established in March 2006 by the UN General Assembly, the UPR is designed to prompt, support, and expand the promotion and protection of human rights in every country. It is a unique mechanism of the Human Rights Council that calls for each UN Member State to undergo a peer review of its human rights records every 4.5 years. One of the 3 main pillars of UPR is the stakeholder report, in which Local civil society organizations, indigenous groups, and human rights defenders inside a non-self-governing territory can draft and submit their own findings directly to the OHCHR, bypassing their territorial administrators entirely.

7.4. Case Studies: Western Sahara, New Caledonia and Falkland Islands

Western Sahara

Western Sahara is one of the 17 non-self-governing territories situated in Northwest Africa, administered *de jure* by Spain. Western Sahara is the last African colonial state yet to achieve independence and has been dubbed "Africa's last colony".

Historically, Western Sahara has been a part of Spain after the 1884 Berlin Conference, in which European colonization in Africa was regulated and the African Lands were shared between different imperial powers. Even though the first colony was established in the same year Berlin Conference happened, the Spanish were unable to pacify the interior of the region until the 1930's, since many raids and rebellions were being made by the indigenous population.



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As time went by, Spanish colonial rule began to unravel with the general wave of decolonization after World War II; former North African and sub-Saharan African possessions gained independence from European powers. At the same time, many claims of sovereignty were made by both Morocco and Mauritania, arguing that Western Sahara was separated artificially from their territories by European powers. Algeria, which also bordered the territory, viewed their demands with suspicion. The Algerian government in 1975 committed to assisting the Polisario Front, which opposed both Moroccan and Mauritanian claims and demanded full independence of Western Sahara.

Currently, the Polisario front is still active in the region. Approximately 30% of Western Saharan Land is controlled by the Polisario front, and the remaining 70% is occupied by Morocco. Morocco maintains the berm, a 2,700 km-long (1,700 mi) wall lined with land mines that splits the territory. The Polisario Front is primarily supported by Algeria and has received partial international recognition and membership in the African Union.

New Caledonia

New Caledonia is a French non-self-governing territory situated in the Southwest Pacific Ocean. Approximately 27% of the region's residents are European, while the remainder consists of Kanak people, the island's indigenous population, and individuals from various neighboring island nations.

Its colonial history begins in the year 1864, the year when it became a penal colony of France. In the same year, nickel, which is a precious Iron-like metal, was discovered on the Island; and Nickel mining began. To work the mines the French imported labourers from neighbouring islands and from the New Hebrides, and later from Japan, the Dutch East Indies, and French Indochina.

The indigenous Kanak people were excluded from the French economy and from mining work, and ultimately confined to reservations. This sparked a violent reaction in 1878, when High Chief Ataï of La Foa managed to unite many of the central tribes and launched a guerrilla war that killed 200 Frenchmen and 1,000 Kanaks.

After the Second World War, New Caledonia became an overseas territory of France in 1946. By 1953, French citizenship was granted to all New Caledonians regardless of their ethnic background.



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During 1940's and 1950's, New Caledonia strengthened its economic ties with Australia, supplying nickel in exchange for coal vital for smelting nickel. The European and Polynesian populations gradually increased in the years leading to the nickel boom of 1969–1972, and the indigenous Kanak Melanesians became a minority, though they were still the largest ethnic group.

Between 1976 and 1988, a period referred to as “the Events”, conflicts between French government actions and Kanak Independence movements saw periods of violence and instability. Many small and major-sized rebellions and protests have taken place throughout this period.

The Matignon Agreements, signed on 26 June 1988, ensured a decade of stability. The Nouméa Accord, signed 5 May 1998, set the groundwork for a 20-year transition that gradually transfers competences to the local government.

Following the timeline set by the Nouméa Accord, three referendums have been held in 2018, 2020 and 2021. All of them ended with voters choosing to remain a part of France.

In 2024, riots broke out because of a debate over a proposed electoral reform in the territory, causing “2024 New Caledonia unrest”; leading to at least 13 deaths and a declaration of state of emergency by the French government. In October, the bill was cancelled to prioritize maintaining calm and preventing further unrest.

In 2025, political talks were held in Paris, to establish a new “State of New Caledonia”. Residents of New Caledonia who have lived in New Caledonia for at least ten years will be given the right to vote, starting with the 2031 provincial elections. Such a deal is to be confirmed by the French Parliament in the fourth quarter of 2025, with the deal to then be voted on by New Caledonians in 2026 as a referendum.



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Falkland Islands

Falkland Islands is a British non-self-governing territory, situated in the Southwest Atlantic Ocean, close to the Argentinian coast. The population of about 3500 people consists of around 40% native-born Falkland Islanders, with the rest of the population being immigrants, primarily from the United Kingdom, the South Atlantic island of Saint Helena, Chile, and the Philippines. Under the 2009 Constitution, the islands have full internal self-government; the UK is responsible for foreign affairs, retaining the power "to protect UK interests and to ensure the overall good governance of the territory"

The United Kingdom and Argentina both declare their sovereignty over the Falkland Islands. The UK positions itself on their continuous administration since 1833, whereas Argentina claims that they acquired the Falklands from Spain when they gained independence in 1816.

In March 2013, a referendum was held on the Island, with 99.8% of the population choosing to stay a part of the United Kingdom. By the British government, this was seen as "an unwavering declaration of democracy and self-governance", against the claims of Argentina. This helped the policy of overseas territories staying under British rule by choice.



8. Questions to be Addressed

- How can Non-self-governing territories which choose to remain under the administration of another nation be differentiated from those that seek independence?
- How can the economic systems of non-self-governing territories be shaped to increase economic self-sufficiency?
- How can a balance between territorial integrity and self-determination be strengthened?
- Which mechanisms should be considered for determining future status and dependence of Non-Self-Governing territories?
- Under what circumstances should a Non-Self-Governing Territory be removed from the UN list and become eligible for UN membership?
- Which mechanisms should be used to determine the wishes of the population of a Non-Self-Governing territory, regarding its current and future political status?
- How can the rights of minorities and indigenous people of a Non-Self-Governing territory be protected during the process of decolonization?
- Which International organizations and Non-governmental Organizations should be in collaboration to observe the decolonization process and protect Self-determination rights of Non-Self-Governing territories?



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