

GMUNC XIII



SPECPOL

Background Guide

Topic: Decolonization of Non-Self-Governing Territories

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I. Conference Information

It is our immense pleasure to welcome all delegates to the Gunn Model United Nations Conference XIII! Before you start reading this background guide, please remember that position papers must be submitted by October 17 to be considered for a research award. The final deadline is October 23 for the remaining general awards (all awards except research awards). If you do not submit a position paper by 11:59 p.m. on this date, you will **NOT** be eligible for any committee awards. For questions on position paper requirements, please check out the position paper writing guide on the GMUNC website (<https://gmunc.org/conference>). In addition, we will not tolerate any use of AI; if AI is sufficiently detected, you will be disqualified from **ALL** awards, and your delegation will be made aware. Please send position papers in **PDF format** (we will not accept sharing of Google Docs or any other methods) and committee-specific inquiries to the committee email address gmuncxiiispecpol@gmail.com.

II. About Chairs

Head Chair:

Dear Esteemed Delegates,

My name is Sarah Grupenhoff, and I am thrilled to serve as your Head Chair for GMUNC XIII. As a current senior at Henry M. Gunn High School, I have been involved in MUN since my freshman year. This club has not only strengthened my ability to articulate myself, but also built a close-knit community of peers whom I learn from every day.

MUN has allowed me to explore my passion for social justice and human rights, two concepts heavily intertwined with SPECPOL's focus on accountability for colonial systems of exploitation and oppression. I am incredibly excited to facilitate diplomatic discussions among delegates in fulfilling this focus.

Outside of MUN, I pursue my interest in social justice advocacy as co-president of my school's Amnesty International chapter. I am also a student journalist, serving as editor-in-chief of my school newspaper, as well as an avid reader.

Having co-chaired the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee at GMUNC XII last year, I am honored to be chairing once again. I sincerely hope to create an inclusive, inviting environment that motivates each of you to step outside of your comfort zone, and I look forward to hearing what thoughtful ideas and solutions you come up with. Wishing you the best of luck with your position papers!



Warmly,

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Sarah Grupenhoff

Co-Chair:

Greetings Delegates,

Global progress doesn't happen in a vacuum. It is forged by people willing to sit at a table, confront uncomfortable histories, and negotiate a better path forward for all. This year, our committee is stepping directly into that trembling arena to tackle the decolonization of non-self-governing territories. It is an immense privilege to welcome you to SPECPOL as your Co-Chair.

My name is Ira Tiwary, and I am a sophomore at Gunn High School. My time in Model UN has extended across four years and three schools. I am stoked to be guiding a group of talented delegates this year, after having the opportunity to staff at GMUNC last year as well. Beyond the social and academic skills it brings, Model UN has taught me that the most powerful weapon a diplomat, or even an eager high schooler, possesses isn't a loud voice, but the ability to listen intently and bridge deep ideological divides. This committee's focus on dismantling imperialistic structures in marginalized regions is deeply meaningful to me because it mirrors my own commitment to bringing awareness about understated stories with the vitality of words.

When I pull myself away from MUN's exciting world of international politics, I'm usually reading, writing, or speaking about sensitive topics on different platforms, leading our school's Speech and Debate team, or experimenting with different kinds of poetry.

Whether you are aiming for a gavel or stepping up as a delegate for the very first time, please know that our Dais is dedicated to creating a chamber rooted in mutual respect and creative thinking. We are looking for delegates who value substance over performative rhetoric and who aren't afraid to propose unconventional solutions.

Dive deep into your research, challenge your own assumptions, and come ready to burn and build bridges.



With great anticipation,
Ira Tiwary

III. Foreword

Welcome to the Gunn Model United Nations Conference XIII and Special Political and Decolonization Committee. Having previously co-chaired at GMUNC, I am honored to be part of this conference again and am looking forward to another memorable year.

This committee will focus on the decolonization of non-self-governing territories, addressing the sovereignty of the seventeen of those

remaining around the world. Delegates will grapple with how to balance local populations' right to self-determination with the political and economic objectives of the administering Powers. Local populations' preferences, including potential desires to maintain current territorial status as opposed to strictly complying with the UN's decolonization mandate, will also persist as a key point of consideration in the committee.

A couple of reminders to note: (1) Your position paper is not just some tedious writing assignment to get out of the way as quickly as possible. Thoroughly preparing by researching the topic now and developing a solid understanding of your country's stance will serve you well when the committee is in session. (2) When the committee does motion to open debate, put yourself out there. To quote activist Maggie Kuhn, "Speak your mind, even if your voice shakes." MUN is largely a learning experience, one in which every delegate in attendance is a student. Your chairs and fellow delegates are all here to support you; even if it is your first time at a conference, do not shy away from speaking up.

I wish you all the best of luck in writing your position papers, and cannot wait to see so many creative minds come together to craft comprehensive resolutions!



Sarah Grupenhoff
Head Chair

IV. Introduction

The Special Political and Decolonization Committee, otherwise known as SPECPOL or the Fourth Committee, addresses a wide range of topics, all of which pertain in some way to international political and territorial disputes. These include but are not limited to decolonization, peacekeeping operations, and cooperative use of outer space. This year at GMUNC XIII, SPECPOL will concentrate on the former, working toward a solution that considers the right to self-determination in combination with locals' preferences and international political aims.

The Fourth Committee's broad focus can be attributed to its history. Originally two distinct committees, SPECPOL was established in 1990 as a consolidation of the Decolonization Committee and Special Political Committee into a single body.

V. Background Information and Past UN Action

The formal concept of modern decolonization emerged directly from the geopolitical restructuring at the end of the Second World War. When the United Nations was established in 1945, roughly one-third of the global population lived under colonial rule or dependent status. Recognizing that the competitive scramble for empires had been a primary driver of both World Wars, the creators of the UN Charter sought to codify international oversight for non-sovereign lands. This resulted in Chapter XI, specifically Articles 73 and 74, of the UN Charter, which established the concept of Non-Self-Governing Territories. Under Article 73, administering Powers explicitly acknowledged that the interests of the inhabitants of these territories were paramount, accepting a sacred trust to promote the well-being of local populations, develop self-government, and assist in the progressive development of free political institutions. Crucially, Article 73(e) legally obligated these powers to transmit regular technical data regarding the socioeconomic and educational conditions in their territories to the UN Secretary-General, bringing colonial administration under international accountability.

The initial post-war system relied heavily on the voluntary compliance of administering Powers, but by the late 1950s, the geopolitical landscape shifted dramatically as a massive wave of anti-colonial movements swept across Asia and Africa. The influx of newly independent nations



completely altered the voting dynamics of the UN General Assembly, creating a powerful, consolidated bloc dedicated to dismantling the remaining empires. This shift culminated on December 14, 1960, when the General Assembly adopted the historic Resolution 1514 (XV), titled the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Resolution 1514 transformed decolonization from a gradual transition into an immediate international imperative, asserting that

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the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation constituted a direct denial of fundamental human rights. Critically, Paragraph 3 of the resolution explicitly states that an inadequacy of political, economic, social, or educational preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence. To monitor the implementation of this declaration, the General Assembly established the Special Committee on Decolonization, known as the C-24, in 1961.

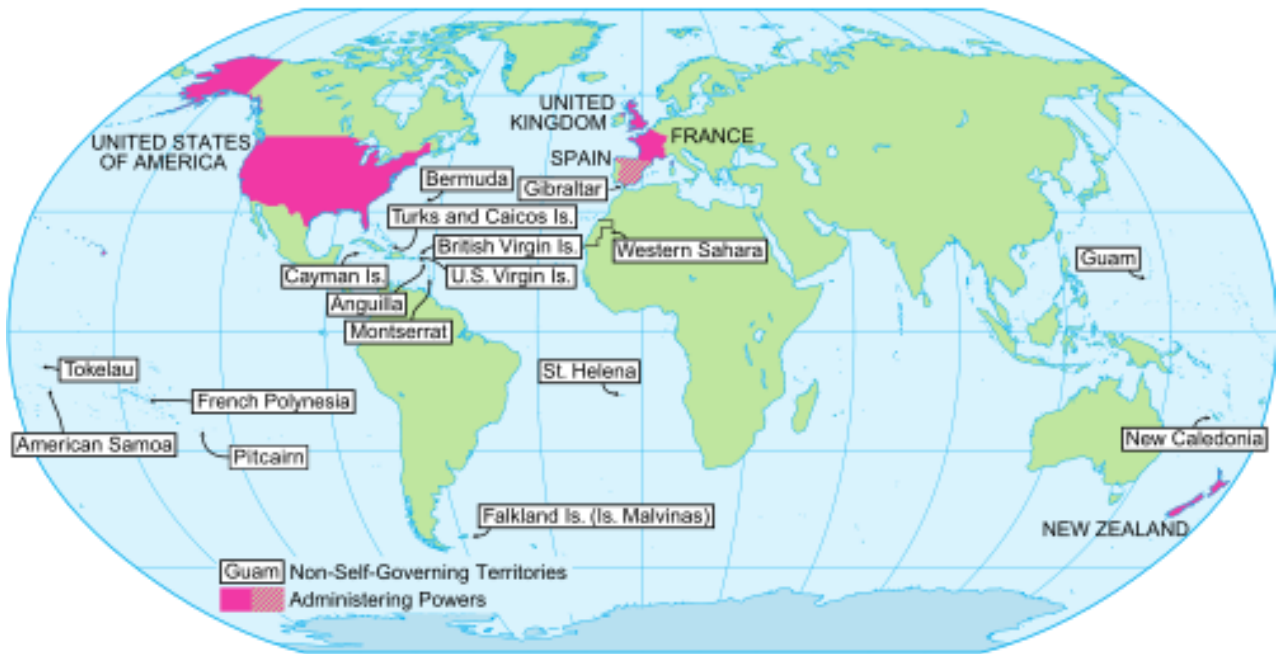
To prevent administering powers from using superficial political reclassifications to avoid UN scrutiny, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 1541 (XV) the day after Resolution 1514. Resolution 1541 remains the most critical legal framework because it defines exactly what constitutes a full measure of self-government through three distinct, legitimate pathways. The first option is the emergence of the territory as a sovereign independent State. The second option is Free Association with an independent State, which involves a voluntary alliance where the territory maintains internal self-governance but typically delegates foreign affairs and defense to the partner nation, provided this choice is made through democratic processes and retains the right to be modified unilaterally. The third option is complete Integration with an independent State on a basis of absolute equality, meaning inhabitants must receive full citizenship, equal political rights, and equal representation in the national legislature. While Resolution 2625 (XXV) later added a clause for any other political status freely determined by a people, the C-24 has historically maintained a strict interpretation favoring the original three options.

Between 1945 and 1990, the combined efforts of the Fourth Committee and the C-24 saw more than eighty former colonies, representing hundreds of millions of people, successfully transition to independence or integration. However, by the late 20th century, this rapid momentum came to a halt as the remaining territories presented unique geographic, economic, and political challenges that did not fit the template of mid-century independence movements. To break this administrative stagnation, the UN declared the 1990s as the first International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. When the year 2000 arrived with little change, the UN declared a Second Decade, followed by a Third, and currently the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism spanning from 2021 to 2030. Despite these successive international campaigns, progress has completely stalled, leaving seventeen distinct territories permanently on the UN's list of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

The core historical driver of this modern stagnation is a profound divergence in how self-determination is interpreted by international bodies versus local populations. For the C-24 and many member states, any political arrangement that leaves a territory under the ultimate constitutional authority of an administering power is viewed as an incomplete and unacceptable continuation of the colonial status quo. Conversely, many contemporary local populations within the remaining territories, such as Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, and Guam, have demonstrated a distinct lack of appetite for outright independence. These territories feature highly specialized economies integrated into global financial networks or rely heavily on the military protection, financial subsidies, and institutional scaffolding of their administering powers. Consequently, local referendums and legislative consensus in these regions have frequently favored maintaining their current territorial status, creating a fundamental philosophical rift between

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international anti-colonial mandates and the actual preferences of the local populations.



VI. Current Situation

The modern decolonization framework faces a profound issue as the international community operates within the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. Seventeen non-Self-Governing Territories remain under international oversight, representing nearly two million people worldwide. The vast majority of these territories are small, geographically isolated island jurisdictions in the Caribbean and Pacific regions, administered primarily by the United Kingdom, the United States, France, and New Zealand, alongside the contested continental territory of Western Sahara. In active United Nations sessions, the Special Committee on Decolonization (C-24) continues to emphasize that the legacy of colonialism leaves deep economic and structural scars, making inequality and exclusion part of the global decision-making. However, the path toward total eradication has hit a systemic wall. Progress has largely stalled because the traditional mid-century standard of outright independence frequently clashes with the pragmatic desires of local populations, who often prefer to maintain or reform their current territorial status rather than sever ties completely with their administering powers.

The central conflict today is the stark divergence between international political theory and localized material reality. For the C-24 and the Fourth Committee, any status that leaves a territory under the ultimate constitutional authority of a foreign state is technically an unacceptable continuation of the colonial status quo. Yet, the day-to-day realities for inhabitants of territories like Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, or Guam are defined by high integration into global financial, tourism, and military systems. These local populations often benefit heavily from the economic stability, federal subsidies, passport privileges, and institutional infrastructure provided by their

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administering powers. In local legislative reviews, these populations have frequently shown a bright eye towards absolute independence, as the immediate costs of sovereign statehood, such as losing citizenship privileges or economic safety nets, outweigh the ideological appeal of a UN-recognized flag.

Beyond the debate over political status, the immediate state of these territories is increasingly compromised by existential environmental and structural crises. As small island developing states, many of the remaining territories find themselves on the front lines of global climate change, facing severe threats from sea-level rise, intensified tropical storms, and coastal erosion that outpace their local administrative capacities.



Furthermore, the specialized nature of their economies has led to rampant food insecurity, high energy costs, and acute vulnerability to external economic shocks. During recent UN sessions, representatives from the Pacific and Caribbean regions have warned that the voices of these territories are systematically underrepresented in international financial institutions. This exclusion leaves them unable to access the critical climate adaptation funds or development loans they desperately need, thereby deepening their structural dependence on the administering powers for emergency relief and financial survival.

The positions of the primary actors involved highlight the deep polarization within the international system. The first group comprises the Administering Powers, primarily the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, who maintain that many of these territories possess a high degree of internal self-governance, democratic representation, and local autonomy. They argue that the international community must respect the democratic referendums and local preferences of the



populations who have repeatedly voted to maintain their current territorial status. Conversely, the Non-Self-Governing Territories themselves present a diverse spectrum of perspectives. While many Caribbean and Pacific territories prioritize economic stability and environmental aid over sovereign independence, local leadership in territories like New Caledonia and French Polynesia continues to navigate internal fractures

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between pro-independence and pro-autonomy factions. Meanwhile, C-24, backed heavily by a consolidated bloc of member states from the Global South, stands firmly by the strict definitions of Resolution 1541, arguing that allowing administrative powers to maintain permanent control over foreign territories under the guise of local consent risks legitimizing a form of modern neo-colonialism.

International responses remain deeply split along geopolitical lines, frequently turning the decolonization agenda into a battleground over national sovereignty and territorial integrity. In territories like the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar, the local populations have voted overwhelmingly to retain their constitutional ties to the United Kingdom, a position defended by the British government. However, neighboring states like Argentina and Spain reject the validity of these local votes, arguing before the UN that these enclaves violate their own historic territorial integrity and must be resolved through bilateral state-to-state negotiations rather than local self-determination. Meanwhile, the situation in Western Sahara remains a highly militarized, protracted frozen conflict. A large coalition of African states, supported by the African Union, continues to demand the execution of a long-delayed UN-mandated referendum for the Sahrawi people, while Morocco maintains administrative control over the majority of the territory and advocates for an autonomy proposal under Moroccan sovereignty. This ongoing gridlock extends far past the simple, binary issue of independence versus colonialism.

VII. Country Positions

Administering Powers and the Western Bloc: The structural positions of the Western administering powers, primarily the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, are grounded in the constitutional and electoral records of their remaining overseas jurisdictions, such as Guam, Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, and New Caledonia. In multiple local referendums and legislative reviews, populations within these territories have frequently registered majorities in favor of maintaining or reforming their existing territorial status rather than seeking absolute independence. These powers operate frameworks where territories possess their own elected parliaments, distinct judiciaries, and high degrees of internal legislative autonomy. Furthermore, their governance structures highlight that these jurisdictions are deeply integrated into metropolitan financial systems, receive significant federal subsidies, and grant local citizens direct access to metropolitan passports and security umbrellas.

BRICS+ Coalition and the Global South: The expanded BRICS+ bloc, anchored by nations with foundational histories of anti-colonial revolution, including India, South Africa, and Brazil, approaches the issue through the lens of international legal precedent and systemic resource dynamics. Economic data highlights that many Non-Self-Governing Territories possess specialized, single-sector economies heavily reliant on the financial services, military expenditures, or import networks of their administering states. This structural reality forms the basis of the bloc's alignment with the strict criteria of UN General Assembly Resolution 1541 (XV). Rather than viewing status quo relationships as purely voluntary, these nations point to the historical lack of diversified local

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infrastructure and the ongoing absence of neutral, internationally monitored education campaigns regarding sovereign statehood.

European Union: The European Union's position is defined by an interplay of internal treaty obligations, regional border disputes, and binding supranational jurisprudence. This complex reality is evident in the case of Gibraltar, where the territory's post-Brexit relationship involves ongoing negotiations regarding integration into the Schengen customs area, even as Spain asserts historical claims to the land based on the principle of national territorial integrity. Legally, the EU is bound by its own highest judicial body, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). The Court has established clear legal precedents stating that trade deals involving the natural resources of non-self-governing regions cannot lawfully proceed without the explicitly verified, separate consent of the territory's population.

Non-Aligned and Regionally Contested Blocs: For the broader assembly of non-aligned nations and regional coalitions, the execution of the decolonization mandate frequently intersects with competing claims over regional security and historical borders. Within the African Union, institutional resolutions formally support the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and call for a UN-mandated referendum in Western Sahara, while a growing coalition of regional states has officially backed Morocco's Autonomy Plan, which proposes internal self-governance under Moroccan sovereignty. The geopolitical landscape is similarly divided in the South Atlantic and the Mediterranean, where the United Kingdom maintains administrative control over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) and Gibraltar backed by local electoral majorities, while Argentina and Spain present historical, geographical, and legal challenges to the validity of those boundaries before international bodies.



VIII. Questions to Consider

- To what extent does a territory's continued reliance on an administering Power's constitutional, legal, and financial systems invalidate the authenticity of referendums advocating for self-determination?
- How can the international community effectively reconcile legally with the democratic choices of local populations who explicitly vote to maintain their current non-sovereign status?
- In cases where a territory's population wishes to retain status quo ties but a neighboring state claims a historic right to the land, which principle takes legal precedence: the local right to self-determination or the neighboring state's right to national territorial integrity?
- How can the UN ensure that non-self-governing territories achieve economic self-sufficiency if their local financial systems are dependent on subsidies, currency, or trade from the administering power?
- If you are an Administering Power or Western Bloc nation: How do you justify the continued constitutional control over foreign territories to a skeptical General Assembly while demonstrating that your administration genuinely upholds local democratic consent?
- If you are a Developing Nation or a member of the BRICS+ coalition: How do you propose to dismantle deep-seated structures of neo-colonial dependency in small island territories without triggering immediate economic collapse or severe instability for the local populations?
- If you are a Regionally Contested State or Bordering Nation: What specific incentives or rhetoric can you offer to encourage a bilateral, state-to-state resolution to protracted frozen conflicts without entirely bypassing the voices of the local inhabitants?
- If you are a state representing the interests of the Non-Self-Governing Territories themselves: What concrete safeguards must you demand to ensure that international anti-colonial mandates do not force your community, inadvertently, into strategic or financial isolation?

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