SPECIAL POLITICAL
AND DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE
(SPECPOL)

Background Guide

Director: Khalid Rizwan

MIMUN 2011

Dear Delegates,

I wish to warmly welcome you to the University of Michigan's 2011 Middle School Model United Nations conference. Over the past eight years the International Affairs Society has been running this event to allow delegates to discuss important international issues in a friendly and informative debate format. Delegates like you are what make this conference a yearly success and are the spirit that drives each committee to achieve meaningful results.

Allow me to introduce myself and my assistant director for the 2011 Special Political Committee. My name is Khalid Rizwan and I am a senior at the University of Michigan's College of Engineering. I am majoring Industrial & Operations Engineering. I believe that the United Nations is one of the most important political institutions to serve as a forum for discussion and resolving disagreements among member states. Open dialogue between nations is essential for the promotion of long term stability in a diverse world. I applaud you for your interest in the United Nations process.

The topic at hand for the 2011 SPECPOL committee will be evaluating when the UN's role in the global reaction towards unrest in the Middle East. The debate over national sovereignty seems to arise whenever UN action is evoked in domestic issues, and therefore the topic remains contentions and worthy of debate.

I know that discussing such topics before others can often lead one to become nervous, so I will do my best to make our debate setting as friendly and comfortable as possible. I encourage everyone to participate, because the only way you will make the most of your MIMUN experience is if you are at the center of debate.

I am looking forward to a great learning experience for all of us. Please feel free to e-mail me if you have any questions or concerns prior to the conference.

Sincerely,
Khalid Rizwan
Director of SPECPOL
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TOPIC: The Global Impact of the Ongoing Political Changes in the Middle East

Protestors gathered in Al-Tahrir Square, Cairo, Egypt to protest against President Hosni Mubarak, who had been in power for almost 30 years.

Why is Political Change in the Middle East a Concern?

For the last century, governance in the Middle East and North Africa has often gone unchecked. This has resulted in several autocratic regimes that have maintained a status quo. These regimes range from the monarchies on the Arabian Peninsula to several autocratic governments in North Africa such as Egypt and Tunisia.

The strategic importance of the region cannot be understates: the Middle East's vast oil reserves supply the world, the Suez Canal in Egypt is a key thoroughfare for international shipping, and relations with governments are key to the worldwide war on terror. Because of these facts, these regimes were allowed to continue unchecked and often engaged in behavior and policies contrary to international accords. This resulted in governments in which the wealth was disproportionately distributed between classes, programs which involved in unlawful detention and torture of political opponents, and several other human rights violations.

Between December 2010 and January 2011, a series of protests broke out in Tunisia against the incumbent President Ben-Ali. These protests were triggered by high unemployment, rampant corruption, and a lack of free speech and political freedom. The protests developed into a large-scale uprising against the government. The involvement of pro-government security forces and police resulted in fatalities and casualties of scores of demonstrators. Four weeks after the protests began; President Ben Ali resigned after fleeing to Saudi Arabia – ending 23 years of rule. Tunisia is now engaged in rebuilding a government with elections to be held in the near future. The Tunisian Revolution sparked a number of other uprisings across the Middle East, most notably in Egypt.

Following the Tunisian Revolution, late January 2011 saw a series of protests in Egypt against the government of Hosni Mubarak, who had ruled for almost three decades. The reasons for the protests were largely similar to the ones in Tunisia: police brutality, corruption, high unemployment, and lack of personal and political freedoms. The demonstrations in Egypt were much more violent and intense than in Tunisia. The cities of Cairo and Suez saw the majority of the violence. The demonstrations also had widespread strikes, civil disobedience, and the protests at times deteriorated into riots. Over 350 people were killed and 5500 injured as security forces and pro-government factions clashed with the protestors. The military eventually intervened. On February 16, Hosni Mubarak stepped down as President and handed the power over to the military who have promised elections within six months.

Egypt, the most populous nation in the Middle East, was often considered a barometer for the stability of the overall region. Instability in Egypt suggested a general overall lack of stability in the Middle East itself. As a result, several nations across the Middle East enacted reforms in order to assuage the growing fears and potential for similar demonstrations. Nevertheless, several

other nations have seen protests (some of which have been violent); these include: Yemen, Jordan, Bahrain, and Libya.

The Role of the United Nations

Many nations view action by the United Nations as an infringement upon their national sovereignty. However, it is imperative that the UN intervene when governments are engaged in acts against international accords. As a result, the UN treads a fine line between enforcing international law and violating national sovereignty. For example, the UN would feel it necessary to intervene when a government orders its military to open fire on peaceful protests. A possible solution would be for the UN to act transparently when making decisions and involving all parties.

Nations are often hostile to international involvement in internal affairs. Increased cooperation between the UN and local and regional organizations would assuage this hostility. Working with local governments and NGO's to impose grassroots change and stability. Additionally, the UN is often criticized for its lack of consistency. The United Nations should establish conventions on how to address political change and its ramifications. More importantly, the UN should strictly follow these conventions in order to stay consistent.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the root cause of instability and uprising in the Middle East? How can these be prevented and what are long-term solutions?

2. What is the best course of action to deal with countries in the region experiencing demonstrations and a lack of stability?

3. What is the best course of action to minimize overall casualties and damage caused by instability?

4. How do you deal with the side effects of such change? Think of refugees, economic collapse, lack of security, etc.

5. What do you do after a successful, or unsuccessful, uprising? What is the best way to enact reforms, or transition government, etc.?

References

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