

Houston Area Model United Nations Standard Committee

UNSC



Chair | Nolan Taarea
Topic A: Addressing the Issue of Parallel
Governments in Conflict Zones
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Chair Letter

Salutations Delegates,

It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I'm Nolan Taarea, proud to be your chair for the United Nations Security Council!

Although I was born in Texas, I was raised for the majority of my life in Indonesia. Nonetheless, my first encounter with Model UN and how I fell in love actually started during my last year living there. As I enter Blinn this fall as a college freshman, I intend to continue my passion for MUN, attending all conferences accessible to me. Since I started, I've participated in 14 conferences as a delegate, and chaired a total of 5 committees, accumulating a total of 15 delegate awards. Although I'd brought no awards home from my very first conference, it truly was the people who convinced me it was worth staying in the community. As I explored many committees and countries, I had learned the true meaning behind becoming a good delegate and have decided to make it my mission to guide the beginners, and challenge the advanced.

The reason I chose to be a chair for the UNSC is because I've experienced first hand how competitive and professional most delegates are in all UNSC committees. It wouldn't be wrong to declare that y'all are the cream of the crop in this conference. The UNSC is strategic, research heavy, and requires meticulous work in both your solutions as well as carving your name in the council. If this is your first time in the UNSC, don't be afraid, because everyone has been there before, and chances are, you aren't the only one.

Ultimately, the only thing that will make your MUN experience a blast is if you make the most of your time in conference making friends, spending time with your friends, and enjoying the learning process of it all!

If you have any questions regarding procedure, tips, or about the UNSC overall, do not hesitate to ask!

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Committee Background

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is a global body whose primary responsibility is for maintaining international peace & security, where they can meet whenever they believe peace is being threatened.

When a complaint concerning a threat to peace is presented to the council, it is the Council's action to first recommend that the parties attempt to reach an agreement by peaceful matters, to which The Council may:

- Set forth principles for such an agreement;
- Undertake investigation and mediation, in some cases;
- Dispatch a mission;
- Appoint special envoys; or
- Request the Secretary-General to use his good offices to achieve a pacific settlement of the dispute.

When the dispute reaches a state of hostility, The Council's main concern is to bring them to an end as soon as possible, where The Council may:

- Issue ceasefire directives that can help prevent an escalation of the conflict;
- Dispatch military observers or a peacekeeping force to help reduce tensions, separate opposing forces and establish a calm in which peaceful settlements may be sought.

Beyond this The Council may opt for enforcement measures, including :

- Economic sanctions, arms embargoes, financial penalties and restrictions, and travel bans;
- Severance of diplomatic relations;
- Blockade;
- Or even collective military action.

A chief concern is to focus action on those responsible for the policies or practices condemned by the international community, while minimizing the impact of the measures taken on other parts of the population and the economy

COUNCIL HISTORY

Since the end of World War II, The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was established to maintain international peace and security among all nations. Following the establishment of the UN Charter, the UNSC held its first session in January, 1946, where 15 member states would discuss plans and strategies in safeguarding international peace and security.

The UNSC, the United Nations principal crisis-management body, is empowered to impose binding obligations on all 193 member states to maintain international peace and security. The Security Council—comprising five permanent members and ten elected members—meets regularly to assess threats to international security including arms proliferation, civil wars, natural disasters, and terrorism. In response to peacekeeping missions, and, in certain instances, authorize the use of force.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The destructive nature of parallel governments may look trivial up front, but its effect on legislative systems is detrimental, especially in conflict zones. Whether that fragmentation erupted because of the existence of rebel groups, a civil war, or external forces trying to take over territory, it is clear that the issue is deeply rooted within nations that are/were conflict zones. As of 2026, the conflict in Sudan alone contributed around 52,904 fatalities since the conflict first started. This isn't just Sudan. Libya, Myanmar, Somalia, Yemen, and many other countries are still suffering from the trap of parallel governments, unable to run away from the mess of weak institutions. Due to the fact that the issue is highly structural and political, it would be irrational to assume national sovereignty alone can solve the problem. As such, it is up to the UNSC to set up boundaries and policies to parallel governments, taking a holistic approach to minimize this structural fragmentation.



TOPIC A BACKGROUND

When a state experiences prolonged political instability or armed conflict, competing groups may establish their own governing institutions within different parts of the country. These institutions can include executive authorities, legislative bodies, courts, security structures, taxation systems, and systems for providing public services. When competing authorities claim legitimacy over the same territory or population, they can create what is commonly described as a parallel government/governance.

Parallel Governments can emerge for many reasons: a central government may lose control of territory during a civil war, an opposition movement may establish administrative institutions in areas it controls, or political disagreements may prevent competing factions from recognizing the authority of a single government. Although these arrangements can sometimes provide basic services where the central state is unable to do so, they can also deepen political fragmentation and make negotiations more difficult.

The issue has become particularly significant in recent conflicts. In Libya, political institutions remain divided between the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity and authorities based in eastern and southern Libya. A 2025 UN report described the country as having two distinct centers of power and noted that parallel administrative structures in the east have complicated efforts to unify national institutions.

The emergence of parallel governments can fundamentally alter the political structure of a state. As competing authorities become more established, they may develop separate institutions, legal systems, security forces, and economic networks. Over time, these institutions can become increasingly independent from one another, making cooperation between factions more difficult. Control over territory can also provide competing authorities with access to resources, taxation, trade, and other sources of revenue that allow them to sustain their administrations. As a result, what may initially develop as a temporary response to political instability can become an entrenched system of governance that is difficult to dismantle through traditional diplomatic negotiations.



Parallel governance also creates complex questions regarding political legitimacy, sovereignty, and international recognition. The international community may continue to recognize one government as the legitimate representative of a state while another authority exercises effective control over substantial territory or population centers. This creates a distinction between *de jure* authority, or the government recognized as legally legitimate, and *de facto* authority, or the group that exercises practical control on the ground. The United Nations must often balance these competing realities while attempting to protect civilian populations and maintain international peace and security. Determining how and when to engage with *de facto* authorities can therefore become a central challenge, as engagement may be necessary for humanitarian access and conflict resolution while potentially strengthening the authority's political position.

TOPIC A HISTORY

Despite looking like a structural problem of the present, the issue of having multiple contesting parties battle for authority has existed since the early ages of the common era (CE) within the Roman Empire. After the death of the 5th Roman emperor Nero, four separate individuals (Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian) were proclaimed “emperor” by different political and military bases. This was a succession crisis with overlapping claims to rule the Roman Empire, even if it was a short lasting issue rather than a territorial long-term split.

For centuries, the structure and intensity of the issue has continued to change, evolved due to complex government systems, expanded from different types of conflict groups, or escalated from unresolved regional disputes. The variative ways parallel governments have formed in the past has caused the issue to be unaddressed, leaving many nations struggling with internal conflicts because they can't tackle the issue.

The following cases represent earlier known parallel government crises that have been solved and the lessons learned from the resolutions.



English Civil Wars (1640-1651)

One of the earliest present day examples of contesting government authority would be shown from the English Civil Wars in 1640. The political divide started due to differing opinions in taxation, religion, and the limits of royal power between Charles I and Parliament. Consequently, competing political and military institutions were separately exercising authority in different parts of the country by the early 1640s. Parliament developed its own executive and military structures while the royal government continued operating from the King's side.

Both these authorities sought their own groups of foreign alliances to establish external legitimacy and secure military leverage. Parliament entered into the Solemn League and Covenant (1643) with the Scottish Covenanters, ultimately creating a cooperative transnational alliance. Meanwhile, Charles I attempted to negotiate separate treaties with the Irish Catholic Confederation.



Figure 1. Charles I in the English Civil Wars

In the end, the conflict was resolved through the execution of Charles I and a republican structure prevailed in the government. Despite the success of military resolution in this scenario, the story will later resume, and the postwar will bring forth the restoration of Charles II. Moral of the story? Ending the war does not equal restoring peace.

The American Civil War (1861-1865)

Following the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, 11 Southern states decided to ban together to create the Confederate States of America (CSA), leading to military conflict at Fort Sumter in April 1861.

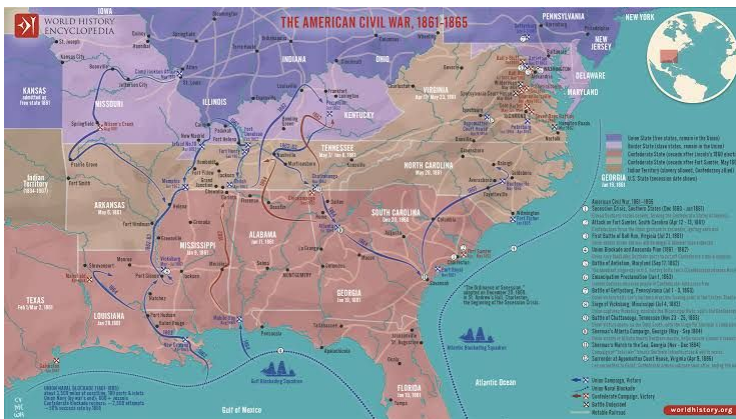


Figure 2. Division of Union and Confederate territories (1861-1865)

The purpose of the Confederation was to expand the norms of slavery and preserve it as a national legality. Southern political leaders framed their separation around the principle of states' rights, arguing that each

individual state held their own sovereignty and had the legal right to ignore federal laws or leave the Union if they deemed their constitutional interests were not aligned.

The Confederation's very existence was built on "states' rights" and opposition to a centralized government. As a result, several individual state governors persistently rejected central policies issued from Confederate President Jefferson Davis regarding troop deployment, taxation, and conscription. The conflict highlights a common vulnerability in parallel governments: decentralized factions often struggle with the united powers of centralized opponents.

UNTAC in Cambodia (1992–1993)

Over the course of the 20th century, a vast majority of regional power was held in the hands of an exclusive political and economic elite within large cities. Because of this, many rural citizens were faced with economic instability, political neglect, and the fallout of foreign military interventions along the border. This status quo eventually led to widespread disenfranchisement across the country, creating the most optimal environment for anti-government sentiment to form in order to challenge the authority of the central state.

As a result of the abrupt overthrow of Prince Norodom Sihanouk's government in 1970, the newly established Lon Nol regime aligned itself closely with foreign powers, further destabilizing the nation's internal peace. This political shift, amplified from the complete exclusion of royalist and leftist factions, enraged rural populations who eventually resorted to armed resistance in order to contest control over the region.

These economic and geopolitical conflicts became the very reason insurgent factions such as the Khmer Rouge emerged in Cambodia, developing the identity of a de facto shadow government across large swathes of the Cambodian countryside.

Fragmentation in the government had to be fixed, hence the UN created The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), which successfully registered over 4.2 million voters (90% of citizens) and took charge of Cambodia's 1993 national elections. Unfortunately, The Khmer Rouge boycotted the elections, refused to disarm their troops, and set up a parallel government in border areas. While UNTAC successfully held national elections, it failed to achieve complete demilitarization or dismantle the parallel power structures in the countryside.



ONUSAL in El Salvador (1979–1992)

Similar to the conflict in Cambodia, El Salvador's civil war started also due to the extreme socioeconomic inequality that plagued the country. The key difference in this conflict includes the escalation of the conflict, with military regimes standing as the main authoritarian body through rigged elections, regional repression, and political opposition. The civil war ended up becoming one of the major battlegrounds of the Cold War, with the El Salvador government receiving military and economic support from the United States, while the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) received help from Cuba and Nicaragua.

Over the 12-year war, the FMLN properly established themselves as a shadow state across northern and eastern El Salvador, collecting local taxes, running alternative administrative systems, and operating a separate military force.

The first initiative by the FMLN launched a massive, coordinated surprise attack on the capital city of San Salvador, dragging the war directly into wealthy urban areas for the first time. The government had realized despite the FMLN's inability to attain followers towards their mission, they still proved to be a difficult threat to deal with in terms of military power.

Recognizing the ongoing military stalemate, both parties officially requested UN mediation in late 1989 under the leadership of Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar. Both parties signed the San José Agreement on Human Rights, leading to the early deployment of the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) before a ceasefire was reached in order to monitor human rights violations. In the end, the signing of the The Chapultepec Peace Accords in January 16, 1992 would mark the end of the war, in which the accords established a comprehensive roadmap for demilitarization, institutional reform, as well as political reintegration.



STATUS QUO

YEMEN AND THE HOUTHIS MOVEMENT

Following political instability and the Houthi takeover of Sana'a in 2014, Yemen developed competing centers of political and military authority. The internationally recognized government retained international recognition, while the Houthi movement established extensive de facto control over significant portions of the country. The conflict subsequently became internationalized through the involvement of regional actors.

The Security Council responded by establishing a sanctions regime through Resolution 2140 (2014). The regime initially imposed a targeted travel ban and asset freeze against individuals threatening Yemen's peace, security, or political transition. In 2015, Resolution 2216 expanded the regime to include a targeted arms embargo. The Council's Yemen sanctions committee continues to be supported by a Panel of Experts.

CONFLICT IN SUDAN

The conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) began in April 2023. As the conflict expanded, the two sides established different areas of territorial and administrative control. The possibility that these competing authorities could evolve into permanent parallel governments has become a major concern for the United Nations.

The concern is particularly significant because the creation of parallel institutions could transform a military conflict into a long-term political and institutional division.

In September 2026, UN Security Council discussions explicitly addressed the danger of parallel governing structures. Council members emphasized that competing institutions could undermine Sudan's sovereignty, unity, and national institutions. The UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Sudan has likewise stated that a long-term arrangement involving two parallel governments or two separate armies is not considered a viable basis for resolving the conflict.

TOPIC A: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Without a doubt, the scope of this topic is quite wide, with the definition of parallel governments taking lots of different scenarios into perspective. To help with your research on in depth implementation of past solutions and formulating your own solutions for the issue, use these questions as a guide:

1. How should the UN determine what counts as a government?
 - a. What criterias, metrics, or definitions should be used?
 - b. Should a rebel group be taken into consideration as a government?
2. Understanding the several causes of parallel governments, what actions is most feasible for the UNSC to use to prevent the emergence of secondary governments?
3. Why should a government want to unify under one legislative system?
4. When should unofficial rival governments be considered into the political process?
5. How should civilians be able to access aid or services regardless of who is in control of the area?
6. Which direction of measures should the UNSC take to tackle governments who do not wish to engage with negotiations diplomatically?



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