What is Equitable Geographic Representation in the Twenty-first Century

Report of a seminar held by the International Peace Academy and the United Nations University, 26 March 1999, New York, USA

Edited by Ramesh Thakur

The United Nations University

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sam Daws

Sam Daws is a consultant on UN affairs. He was previously head of the UN and Conflict Programme at the United Nations Association in London, and has worked for the Quaker UN Office in Geneva and as a Parliamentary researcher at the House of Commons. Mr. Daws has served as a consultant to the UN Department of Political Affairs in New York and on working attachment to the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Since 1990, he has been a Director of 3D Associates, an international law and policy consultancy. He was a Visiting Fellow at Yale in 1995, has degrees in Social Anthropology and International Conflict Analysis and is currently completing a doctorate on UN Security Council Reform at New College, Oxford. He has co-authored five books on the United Nations.

Hasmy Agam

Ambassador Hasmy Agam has been the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations since April 1998. He was Deputy Secretary-General for International Organizations and Multilateral Economics at Malaysia's Foreign Ministry from January 1994 to July 1996. During 1993, he was the Ministry's Director-General on Relations with the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), before which he served as Ambassador to France with concurrent accreditation to Portugal (1990–92). Ambassador Hasmy also has been the Alternate Permanent Representative to the United Nations (1998), Ambassador to Libya and High Commissioner to Malta. He has served at his country's missions in Saigon, Washington, Hanoi and London. In 1981 he was seconded to the National Institute of Public Administration as Head of its Centre for International Relations and Diplomacy.

Terence O'Brien

Since 1993, Terence O'Brien has been the Director of the New Zealand Centre for Strategic Studies, which specializes in issues such as comprehensive and cooperative security in relation to Pacific East Asia. He is a former New Zealand diplomat and served as the New Zealand Permanent Representative to the UN in New York from 1990–93, the Permanent Representative in Geneva from 1980–83 and Ambassador to the EU in Brussels. He also has had diplomatic assignments in Bangkok, London and Raratonga. Mr. O'Brien was the head of the New Zealand delegation to several conferences, including the Rio Environment conference, and also has served on the UN Security Council.
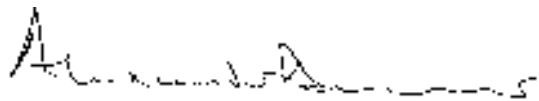
Ramesh Thakur

Professor Ramesh Thakur is Vice Rector (Peace and Governance) of the United Nations University. Educated in India and Canada, he was formerly Head of the Peace Research Centre at the Australian National University and Professor of International Relations at the University of Otago. He was a member of the National Consultative Committee on Peace and Disarmament in Australia, having previously been a member of the Public Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament in New Zealand. He is the author/editor of over a dozen books, the most recent being *Keeping Proliferation at Bay* (1998), *Past Imperfect, Future UNcertain: The United Nations at Fifty* (1998) and *Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones* (1998), and has written 150 articles for journals and chapters for books.

FOREWORD

As part of Australia's interest in reform of the regional electoral groupings of the United Nations, we were happy to co-sponsor, with the United Nations University, the International Peace Academy-hosted seminar "What is Equitable Geographic Representation in the 21st Century." Configuration of the UN's electoral groupings, which underlies the legitimacy of the UN's decision-making, is one key element that has to-date been missing from the reform debate. To help redress that omission, the seminar brought together distinguished speakers and individuals with an interest in reform of the United Nations. It served to raise awareness of the issue of electoral group reconfiguration and succeeded in moving the debate on this very important issue into the public arena.

The regional groupings were established to ensure that there was fair and equitable representation of the membership in the various UN bodies, so that all members who desired the opportunity to make a contribution to the decision-making of the UN could do so. More than three decades after the creation of the present groupings, it is timely that we focus on their relevance to present and future geopolitical realities and to the principle of equitable representation. The current group system reflects the dominant political features of the 1960s. Since the formation of the current groupings, more than sixty nations have joined the United Nations, leading to a significant disparity between the size of the groupings and thus to an inadequate level of representation for some sub-regions - the Africa Group is now the largest with 53 members, while the Eastern European Group is the smallest with 21. The social and political diversity of the larger groups calls into question the ability of a single member to represent any one group. I am confident that this seminar and the publication of the discussions will raise the profile of this issue among members of the United Nations. Australia looks forward to continuing to work with others to promote ideas for equitable geographic representation in the twenty-first century.

The Hon. Alexander Downer, MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra, Australia
22 July 1999

UN ELECTORAL GROUPINGS REFORM

Prof. Ramesh Thakur, Vice Rector (Peace and Governance), United Nations University

International organizations touch our daily lives in myriad ways. They are an important means of arranging the functioning of the state-based international system more satisfactorily than had proven to be the case in conditions of international anarchy. The United Nations lies at their legislative and normative center. If it did not exist, we would surely have to invent it. Yet the founding vision of a world community equal in rights and united in action is still to be realized.

In the midst of the swirling tides of change, the UN must strive for a balance between the desirable and the possible. The Charter was a triumph of hope and idealism over the experience of two world wars. The flame flickered in the chill winds of the Cold War. But it has not yet died out. The organization's greatest strength is that it is the only universal forum for cooperation and management. The global public goods of peace, prosperity, sustainable development and good governance cannot be achieved by any country acting on its own. The United Nations is still the symbol of our hopes and dreams for a better world, where weakness can be compensated by justice and fairness, and the law of the jungle replaced by the rule of law.

The UN has to strike a balance also between realism and idealism. It will be incapacitated if it alienates its most important members by imposing the tyranny of the majority against their vital interests. Its decisions must reflect current realities of military and economic power. But it will also lose credibility if it compromises core values. The UN is the repository of international idealism, and Utopia is fundamental to its identity. Even the sense of disenchantment and disillusionment on the part of some cannot be understood other than in this context.

The UN represents the idea that unbridled nationalism and the raw interplay of power must be mediated and moderated in an international framework. It is the centre for harmonizing national interests and forging the international interest. The UN's learning curve shows that its ideal can neither be fully attained nor abandoned. Like most organizations, the UN is condemned to an eternal credibility gap between aspiration and performance. The real challenge is to ensure that the gap does not widen, but stays narrow.

One respect in which the gap has widened steadily is the relationship between the evolution and structure of the organization. UN operations are conducted essentially within the framework of a Charter signed more than fifty years ago. The time is long overdue to consider substantial reforms that would realign the organization with present-day realities, norms and values. Has the UN cocooned itself in reform-proof procedures and structures? There are indeed some UN-sceptics who argue that no further effort should be invested in reforming the UN as such.[1] Where the rapidity of changes in the world places a premium on flexibility and ability to improvise, say the critics, the UN is hopelessly fossilized and incapable of adaptation.

The critique is overdone. However, it is also true that the structure of the UN reflects essentially the world of 1945, not the world at the turn of the millennium. The principle of equitable geographical representation pervades the UN system and is essential to its principles and ideology. Notions of equity and the balance of geopolitics have changed dramatically since 1945, but the changes are not adequately reflected in the composition of the UN political organs, the relationship between them, and the institutions and workings of the United Nations as a whole.

The bulk of the public debate on structural reform has focused on the permanent and non-permanent membership of the Security Council. In terms of the logic of permanent membership, international stratification is never rigid, and states are upwardly and downwardly mobile. A static permanent membership of the Security Council undermines the logic of the status, erodes the legitimacy of the Council, diminishes the authority of the organization and breeds resentment in the claimants to the ranks of the great powers.

The issue of reforming and expanding the Council to accommodate other countries has been discussed widely in the past few years, and numerous reform proposals have been made. All rest their arguments on the need to make the Security Council more representative. It is said, for example, that at inception, 51 Member States of the United Nations were represented in the Security Council by 5 permanent and 6 non-permanent members. Today a total of 185 Member States[2] are represented in the Council by 5 permanent and 10 non-permanent members. That is, the UN's membership has increased by 263 percent, but the Council has been enlarged by a mere 36 percent. This is especially problematical because the characteristics of the newer UN members since 1945 have been significantly different from the original members.

Of course, the concept of representation pervades the entire UN system, not just the Security Council. UNSC reform is thus a subset of the broader question of reforming the organizing principles, system of representation and distribution of responsible offices in the United Nations at large. Even the composition of the Security Council, at least in relation to non-permanent members, is after all based on the same principle.

The difficulty is that "representation" can have many different meanings.

1. One can represent the interests of one's constituents, as parliamentarians do. In this case, a country need not be a member of a group or region in order to represent its interests. During its two years on the Security Council in 1993–94, for example, New Zealand acted more as a representative of Asian-Pacific and smaller states than of "Western Europe," to which it is attached in the UN system of groupings.

2. The UN groupings, and their relative weighting, can be so composed as to represent accurately population distributions in the countries of the world.

3. A third possible meaning would be in terms of economic weight. Economic strength is recognized as an important, perhaps even the most important, component of national power and international influence quite independently of military strength. The dominance of economics in international relationships is pervasive and unquestioned. The "balance of power" is fundamentally determined by the balance of economic strengths, with the latter in turn being a function of capitalist enterprise and organization. Capital and technology are more important determinants of national power in international relations than natural resources and population. That is, a multi-dimensional conception of security leads in turn to the construction of a multiplex balance of power. The United Nations is the arena where the competing visions of a world order rooted in the different philosophical traditions of realism and idealism are meant to be mediated and accommodated in the organization's structures and processes.

4. Fourth, it could refer to the need for the United Nations to reflect the major cultures, religions and civilizations of the world. The United Nations is a political institution. Its decisions are the resultants, not of judicial, but of political processes of calculation, articulation and reconciliation of national interests. If cultures, civilizations and religions represent the most salient cleavage in contemporary affairs, then, even if they do not necessarily lead to an inexorable clash based on an immutable conflict of interests, they might still need to be recognized formally in the world's preeminent international organization.

5. The most common meaning given to representation is in terms of the different regions of the world. But what is a region? Asia, for example, is a geographical construct developed by the Europeans to differentiate the European "self" from the Eastern "other." In reality the continent is much too diverse on all major dimensions to permit simple generalizations. Moreover, while "region" can be defined with reference to geography, the sense of "regionalism" is based more on a common sentiment. This in turn suggests the need to reconfigure the entrenched geographical groupings in the UN system. The previous Secretary-General listed a possible new set of groupings as Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East and Maghreb, Africa, Central and South Asia, East Asia and Oceania, and the Americas.[3] Perhaps the world community needs to address the question of the unit of UN membership. Should regional

organizations (the Association of South-East Asian Nations, the European Union, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of American States, etc.) be given formal representation in their own right, instead of states, or not at all?

6. If the United Nations is going to come to terms with the challenging questions of poverty and underdevelopment, its legitimacy will be in doubt unless the key developing countries have been incorporated into the management structures. Many countries, especially developing countries, are worried that the forces of globalization impinge adversely on their economic sovereignty, cultural integrity and social stability. "Interdependence" among unequals can mean the dependence of some on international markets that function under the dominance of others. To the extent that the United Nations is the central coordinating agency of the global commons, developing countries need to be drawn into its key management bodies so as better to protect their interests. A greater role for them would help to tilt the organization back towards a more even balance in protecting the legitimate rights of the advanced and developing countries. This is "equitable representation" rather than "equitable geographical representation."

7. There is also the need to enfranchise non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and multinational corporations (MNCs) in the UN system so that it more accurately reflects the world of today. NGOs make up one important layer of international civil society. At present, while NGOs at least have consultative status in the UN system in the General Assembly, MNCs have no formal status. Multinational firms are major players in international affairs, yet they remain disenfranchised in the UN system. Such detachment from the realities of political and economic power risks undermining the credibility and effectiveness of the organization.

Debating the Issue

The United Nations University (UNU) joined forces with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of Australia and the International Peace Academy (IPA) to organize a seminar in New York on 26 March 1999 on "Equitable Geographic Representation in the 21st Century." The seminar was hosted by the IPA. Gillian Bird of DFAT and Ramesh Thakur of UNU co-chaired the presentations and ensuing discussion. We brought together three lead papers to initiate discussion on the subject, addressing the past, present and future of electoral groups.

   The first speaker, Sam Daws from Oxford University, examined the factors and intentions that led to the development of the current groups and the options considered at the time of their establishment.

   The second speaker, Ambassador Terence O'Brien of the Centre for Strategic Studies of New Zealand, examined the changes to the geopolitical structure since the development of the current groups and how this has

created imbalances within and between the various electoral groups. He also looked at how the group dynamics work now as compared to when the groups were established, and whether geography is still a relevant basis for the groups. His paper also sketched the broad outlines of just one among many possible options for reconfiguration.

The third speaker, Ambassador Hasmy Agam from the Permanent Mission of Malaysia, examined how to progress any realignment of the electoral group system to address the geopolitical realities of the next century and the scope for implementing such change. He explored what the longer-standing debate on Security Council reform can tell us about the need to change the current electoral group system and the scope for achieving such change.

The discussion that followed among the forty or so Permanent and Deputy Representatives who had accepted the invitation to the seminar ranged far, wide and deep. The philosophical parts of the reflection dwelt upon the nature of the United Nations and its links to the wider world "out there." The operational parts of the discussion sought to come to terms with the balance of interests embedded in any particular configuration and the practical modalities of proceeding to initiate and sustain the debate on reconfiguration without alienating any powerful interests that could thwart the effort.

UN Authority and Legitimacy

The core of the UN influence in world affairs rests in its identity as the only authoritative representative of the international community. When we affirm the existence of an international society, an international system and world institutions, questions immediately arise as to the possibility and nature of international authority. International society exists only to the extent that Member States observe limits on their freedom of action in pursuing national interests and acknowledge the authority of these limits. The UN is a community-building institution; to strengthen its structure and function is to provide it with greater community-building authority. The United Nations was to be the framework within which members of the international system negotiated agreements on the empirical rules of behaviour and the legal norms of proper conduct in order to preserve the semblance of society.

That is, the community-sanctioning authority to settle issues of international peace and security has been transferred from the great powers acting in concert to the United Nations. Acceptance of the United Nations as the authoritative expositor of values in international society is demonstrated by the fact that even noncompliance with Council or Assembly directives is defended by efforts to show the error, unfairness, or illegality of the collective decision. Every such effort, whether it succeeds or fails in its immediate task, is a confirmation, not a negation, of the *right* of the United Nations to engage in collective decision-making.

The decisions of the United Nations command authority because they are the outcome of an international political process of the assertion and recon-

ciliation of national interests. It is the political process that authenticates UN resolutions and converts them into authoritative prescriptions for the common good of humanity. "Authority" signifies the capacity to create and enforce rights and obligations that are accepted as legitimate and binding by members of an all-inclusive society who are subject to the authority. "Power" is different from "authority" to the extent that it is the capacity simply to enforce a particular form of behaviour. Authority, even when associated with power or force, necessarily connotes "legitimacy." That is, authority is distinct from power to the extent that it entails acceptance of right by those to whom it is applied.

Both authority and power are important in the regulation of human behaviour. The function of either term is to stress its role of conduct regulation *in contrast* to alternative means of controlling behavior. In particular, authority and power are used to distinguish each other in the exercise of influence. The concept of authority is used to clarify ways in which behaviour is regulated *without* recourse to power; a recourse to power is made necessary to enforce conformity when authority has broken down. Thus the use of power indicates both a failure of authority, and the determination to restore it.

Furthermore, attempts to enforce authority can only be made by the *legitimate agents* of that authority. What distinguishes rule enforcement by criminal thugs from that by policemen is precisely the principle of legitimacy. The concept of legitimacy therefore acts as the connecting link between the exercise of authority and the recourse to power.

Segments of international society have diffused, fragmented and multiple layers of authority patterns. The central role of the United Nations as the applicator of legitimacy suggests that international society as a whole is characterized by congruence of authority. The reason for this is that the United Nations is the only truly global institution of a general purpose which approximates universality. The role of custodian of collective legitimacy enables the United Nations, through its resolutions, to promulgate authoritative standards of state behaviour or codes of conduct against which to measure the compliance of governments. To the extent that the near-universal character of the organization enhances its role as the dispenser of international legitimacy, the UN has extended the principle of equitable geographical representation (which in practice also includes political balance) to virtually every facet of its operation, including peace-keeping missions.

But what if there should be significant shortcomings in the way in which the principle of equitable geographical representation is organized or applied? Foreign Minister Downer points out in his "Foreword" that the United Nations risks an erosion of legitimacy if the imbalances and distortions accumulating in the system of electoral groupings are not addressed and rectified.

The chapters that follow look at the establishment of the electoral system and its evolution in the early years of the United Nations, the geopolitical and economic changes that have led to an accumulation of imbalances in the

system, the possible consequences of not correcting the imbalances, and the possible approaches to correcting them. What assumptions and expectations might have underpinned the thinking of those who devised the system and arrangements? To what extent have their original assumptions and expectations been vindicated, negated or simply overtaken? Daws traces some ideas and developments in this connection that are not widely known or remembered today.

O'Brien bases his paper on the notion of the importance of the electoral groupings to the essential legitimacy of the United Nations. The present configuration, he argues, negates the Charter principle that all Member States, no matter how small, should be able to take part in the key institutions of the UN system on the basis of equitable rotation. The present system of groups does not produce such efficacious outcome, and the result is to erode the overall legitimacy of the UN system and decisions.

This also cuts against the democratizing trend in world affairs. Reorganizing the number and composition of electoral groupings would therefore, O'Brien argues, enhance the democratic credentials of the UN system, consolidate its legitimacy and increase the efficiency of its workings. He notes that negotiating delays and frustrations, for example in connection with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, have arisen not because of the large numbers of actors involved in the negotiation, but because some key Member States have chosen to opt out of the process. Extending the same arguments further, O'Brien notes that any new system must demonstrate an equivalence of benefits to all groups through "win-win" outcomes. (Although Hasmy makes the intriguing comment that a consensus may develop on the basis of a rough equivalence of discomfort or disappointment rather than expectation of reciprocal benefits.) O'Brien's interesting suggestion is to increase the number of groups and thereby shrink the size but strengthen the homogeneity of each. The details of his schema are less important, he believes, than the principles underpinning them.

Implicit in O'Brien's analysis is the unfairness of the significant disparity in the size of regional groups, ranging from 21 to 53. The Western and Eastern European groups have also been substantially transformed with the major changes in the continent since the end of the Cold War. The origins of the electoral groupings, the philosophy underlying them, and the changes that they have experienced are traced in a fascinating essay by Daws.

As O'Brien notes, the discussion of reconfiguring the electoral groupings can be decoupled from the debate on the reform of the Security Council composition, but does feed into it. Conversely, Hasmy suggests that efforts to reconfigure the electoral groupings should learn from the failures to advance the agenda of Security Council reform. An added bonus of a logically coherent reconfiguration would be to devolve the decision on length of Security Council tenure for its representatives to each group separately. Such an oblique approach to the Security Council structure and composition might succeed in reviving the momentum for its reform, which has flagged under the weight of more frontal approaches. Success in reconfiguring the electoral

groups, therefore, would simultaneously realign the United Nations with present-day reality, consolidate its legitimacy, increase its efficiency and underpin the Security Council with a more pluralist foundation. (There is always the fear, of course, that linking the issue of electoral group reconfiguration to Security Council reform will promote neither and kill both.)

Hasmy, too, links the question of electoral group reconfiguration to ongoing efforts to overhaul and modernize the UN system as a whole. In this connection, he poses the question whether the need is for mere repair or complete overhaul. He makes a number of highly pertinent observations regarding the modalities and process of going about the task. Underlining O'Brien's concern to ensure that any change must not be inimical to the interests of individual or groups of Member States, Hasmy also emphasizes the need both to forge and nurture consensus through intensive and ongoing consultations, and to allay any fears and suspicions of damage to national interests. Instead of taking a confrontational approach, would-be reformers should secure and retain the confidence of all Member States. Moreover, Hasmy issues a timely warning against an approach that seeks to guide negotiations in the image of a predetermined outcome. At the same time, he issues a challenge to Member States to broaden their horizons and think of group and regional interests as well as narrower national interests.

All the authors of this volume draw attention to the confusion between representation and distribution, a point that was widely picked up in the discussion in New York on 26 March 1999. Moreover, should we be talking of "equitable" in terms of opportunities, or outcomes? And what of states that are persistently disenfranchised and disempowered? As Hasmy points out, those who founded the UN system believed that they were providing fair and reasonable opportunity for all Member States who were so inclined to share in the management of the system through periodic election to the key decision-making bodies, in particular the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The concept of equitable geographical representation and distribution applies also to UN staffing arrangements. The system has not quite worked as envisaged. Hasmy is not alone to highlight Africa's exceptionalism in actually having devised a reasonably fair and equitable rotational system. In most other groups, contestation for quota seats to elective positions is very real and can be bitter, divisive and sometimes even hovering on the margins of questionable practices.

Hasmy notes that for reasons of prestige and status (of the permanent missions in New York as well as home governments), most countries are not likely to accept the proposition that their interests can be adequately represented by others. But a failure to gain election to the management and decision-making bodies is not just bad for morale and prestige. It also denies a wider and more pluralistic base to the bodies themselves, narrows the range of perspectives informing their decisions, and impedes the acquisition of expertise in multilateral diplomacy by the perenially defeated countries.

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Conclusion

The existing equilibrium might be inequitable, but also stable if based on certain entrenched interests. Some of the institutions and organs with the greatest impact in the contemporary world are also among the least democratic; is the effectiveness of the United Nations really compromised by the lack of democratic representation? Some of the participants at the March seminar in New York questioned whether the system was really so badly broken as to need fixing.

Most participants, however, thought that the system was badly in need of repair. Concerns have grown about the fairness, legitimacy and credibility of the organization, and therefore about its long-term viability. The current system deflects attention and resources from the world's real problems to protracted and expensive campaigning. Failure to institute changes in the electoral groupings could restrict the capacity of the United Nations to become more relevant and responsive to its full membership. The deep sense of disenchantment, powerlessness and distance of Member States from the key UN decision-making bodies does not just erode the authority of the United Nations. It also undermines the effectiveness of the organization and risks displacing it from the centre to the periphery of world affairs.

In any case, how meaningful is geography as the unit of cohesion in today's world? Not all countries in a region caucus on relevant issues; the political, economic and cultural-religious correlates can vary quite significantly from geographical neighbourliness; and habits of dialogue and cooperation may be rooted more in history than geography. As Daws points out, from the start overlap between geographical and caucusing groups was coincidental. The changing and anomalous group memberships of South Africa, Israel, Canada, Australia and New Zealand are especially interesting.

What the seminar in New York did demonstrate was that many thoughtful people and delegations have been preoccupied with the questions that we sought to address. Their reflections and comments on the three papers greatly enriched the debate and confirmed the worth of the exercise. The papers have been brought together in this slim volume in the belief that their content will be of interest to a much wider UN and international audience, and in the hope that they will stimulate a debate that can only strengthen the sinews of multilateral cooperation centred on the United Nations. We all recognize that the task of reforming any part or process of the United Nations involves political sensitivities, and therefore the task has to be approached as a long-term project. Shared goals have to be identified, coalitions formed, political constituencies nurtured, common interests identified and a consensus forged.

What will make the time and effort worthwhile is the strongly and broadly held view that reform will deliver benefits all round. A useful approach, someone suggested, might be for the UN Secretary-General to canvass the views of Member States through a simple resolution of the UN General Assembly. In the meantime, though, Member States can meet and discuss the

issues informally among themselves. We hope that the three chapters which follow in this booklet will prove useful in that process.

Notes

1 Rosemary Righter, *Utopia Lost: The United Nations and World Order* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund Books, 1995).
2 Since the seminar, Tonga, Nauru and Kiribati have taken their places as members of the United Nations at the commencement of the General Assembly's 54th session, bringing the total membership to 188. It is expected they will join the other Pacific Island states in the Asia electoral group.
3 In an address to the Korea Conference on the United Nations, Seoul, 1 April 1996; document SG/SM/5944 (Sydney: UN Information Centre).

THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF UN ELECTORAL GROUPS

Sam Daws, Consultant on UN Affairs based at New College, Oxford

Who controls the past controls the future.[1]

The key to any attempt to reconfigure the current system of UN electoral groups is an understanding of its origins, and its evolution, to the present day. The aim of this chapter is to examine this history and evaluate what lessons can be learned. Published literature on this topic is sparse, and so considerable use has been made of material from diplomatic archives in Canberra, London and Washington.

The Evolution and Institutionalization of the UN Electoral Group System

The evolution of UN electoral groups has been marked by incremental formalization and institutionalization. In the beginning there were electoral *slates* in the 1946 General Assembly elections, based on the sponsoring powers' "Gentlemen's Agreements." The geographical pattern of states elected to UN bodies was replicated in 1947, 1948 and 1949, creating precedents for *geographical distribution*. This in turn helped crystallize electoral *categories*. These categories were first given *de jure* General Assembly recognition in 1957.[2] In turn, electoral *groups* evolved over time to "fill the shoes" of those electoral categories. Electoral groups first came of age in 1963 when a more geographically-based system was negotiated and approved by the General Assembly, resulting in the five current recognized electoral groups.[3]
   This chapter divides the evolution of UN electoral groups into four time periods:

1. The League of Nations as antecedent;
2. The drafting of the UN Charter, and the first set of General Assembly elections;
3. The evolution of UN electoral groups from 1946 to 1963;
4. The expansion of the General Committee in 1963, the Security Council and ECOSOC in 1963/65 and 1971/73, and the creation of the present system of groups.

The final part of this chapter examines the lessons to be learned from the past, and methods of evaluating proposals for reform.

Today, many UN organs, specialized agencies and other bodies apply principles of geographical distribution in their elections. This chapter, however, focuses principally on UN electoral groups in the context of General Assembly elections to the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and the Assembly's General Committee.[4]

UN General Assembly (UNGA) electoral groups (also referred to as group-ings) are groups of states existing purely for the purpose of allocating seats on UN bodies of limited membership. These, therefore, differ from, but are intricately bound up with, caucus or political groups of states, the function of which is to coordinate action regarding substantive or procedural matters. In some cases, the memberships of electoral and caucus groups are identical. In others, where electoral and caucus group membership diverges, political divisions can indicate that internal pressure for change in the electoral group's membership exists. In practice, a particular "external" grouping of states may impact either positively or negatively on the cohesion of one or more UN electoral group.[5] In this sense, a dependent hierarchy exists. Electoral group stability rests on caucus group homogeneity. Caucus groups in turn reflect geopolitical realities both in terms of the political climate and the effects of changes in international society on the composition and complexion of UN membership.

The League of Nations as Antecedent

The United Nations did not emerge from a vacuum; instead, its Charter and structure owed much to an explicit adoption or rejection of the precedents set by the League of Nations. Two aspects of the experience of the League and the United Nations are worth comparing here.

First, in the initial fifteen years of the League, the Secretariat played a major role in preparing election slates and negotiating compromises between groups of states. As lobbying increased, a Norwegian proposal led to the establishment of a Nominations Committee "to diminish the influence of the Secretariat in elections of the Assembly, and to increase the influence of the small powers upon the choice of the General Assembly."[6]

This Committee operated only for the three years before the Second World War, and only escaped becoming a focus for lobbying itself because of the declining importance of the League and consequently its electoral contests. During preparations for the United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco, both the Executive Committee and the Preparatory Commission discussed establishing a UN nominations committee, but eventually this proposal was dropped.[7] From the birth of the UN, the role of the Secretariat in the preparation of electoral slates was minimal.

Second, the use of geography as a basis for the distribution of seats had been a factor in elections to the League of Nations Council. In 1920, the

League Assembly had decided that the main criterion in the allocation of non-permanent places should be equitable geographical distribution.[8] In identical resolutions in the four years of 1922-25 the Assembly enumerated the other criteria to be taken into consideration. It unanimously recommended that the "Assembly, in electing the six non-permanent members of the Council, should make its choice with due consideration for the main geographical divisions of the world, the great ethnical groups, the different religious traditions, the various types of civilization and the chief sources of wealth."[9]

In practice, the application of "geography" and other criteria to League elections was complicated by the fact that the size of the League Council's permanent, semi-permanent and non-permanent membership changed frequently.[10] However there was a seven-year period, from 1926, when the Council's non-permanent and semi-permanent seats remained nine in total, and an unofficial pattern of distribution emerged. This provided for:

- 3 Latin American States
- 1 Scandinavian State
- 1 Little Entente State (Czechoslovakia, Rumania or Yugoslavia)
- 1 Member of the British Commonwealth
- 1 Far Eastern State (Japan already had permanent membership)
- 1 seat each for Spain and Poland in what were effectively semi-permanent seats, as they had been granted eligibility for immediate re-election.

This distribution effectively pre-allocated all nine non-permanent and semi-permanent seats, leaving approximately a dozen League members electorally disenfranchised. This was only partly remedied by the later addition of two additional non-permanent seats.[11]

The 1946 UNGA "Gentlemen's Agreements" for the distribution of seats on UN elected bodies similarly resulted in electoral disenfranchisement of some UN members. However, the static size of the UN Security Council and ECOSOC in the first 20 years of the United Nations did allow a more regular pattern of distribution of seats to emerge. This stability was eventually undermined by the significant increase in UN membership during that time.

The Drafting of the Charter and the First Set of UNGA Elections

The initial UN electoral distribution categories, which later evolved to become electoral groups, were effectively created by the sponsoring powers, and in particular the US, UK and USSR. As host State, the US did the initial planning for the San Francisco conference. In April 1945 it proposed an executive committee for the conference: to be composed of the five future permanent members plus Brazil, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Iran, Mexico, and the Netherlands. After negotiations with the USSR, Australia, Chile, and

Yugoslavia were added. This resulted in a committee of the five permanent members plus nine others. The high profile of the Committee's work and the support of the sponsoring powers, meant that eight of the nine were elected either to the Security Council or to ECOSOC in the first 1946 elections, occupying all the (then) six non-permanent seats on the Security Council.[12]

More importantly, again on a US initiative, the distribution of seats of the Executive Committee was used to allocate seats in the first elections to the Assembly's General Committee. It was therefore composed of the five permanent members and three Latin American, two British Commonwealth, two Eastern European, one Western European, and one Middle Eastern members. This was an important precedent in that the geographical distribution which had been implicit in the composition of the appointed, not elected, Executive Committee had been generalized, hence de facto creating or necessitating the creation of electoral categories.

Sponsoring powers' informal consultations were also significant in the creation of the aforementioned 1946 "Gentlemen's Agreements," and in producing agreed slates of candidates for these and other UN elections. Such slates came into being primarily through negotiation between the US, UK, and USSR, and later with France and the Latin American states. The Latin Americans, in turn, made a pact with the Arab League to support each others' candidates. Seeds of future dispute were sown, however, by the fact that there was no concrete decision about which states fell into each category.

Ambiguity can be seen in the names given to the distribution categories. In 1945 the British proposed the following distribution for the Security Council: two seats for Latin America, one for Western Europe, one for the British Commonwealth, one for the Near and Far East, and one for the "Russian camp."[13] The following year the US proposed an identical distribution, but named the last two categories "Near East and Africa" and "Eastern Europe."[14] By using the wording "Near and Far East" the British, probably unintentionally, were in danger of electorally disenfranchising Ethiopia and Liberia. By using "Near East and Africa" the US were potentially condemning the Philippines to the same fate. Concern over the potential permanent exclusion of some regions or sub-regions of the world was later expressed at the first General Assembly elections. The semantic difference over "Eastern Europe" was almost certainly intended, as evidenced by the US support in 1946 for the election of Greece to one of the four "Eastern European" seats on ECOSOC, and its later attempts to alter the name of this category.[15]

When the first Security Council elections took place, the geographical distribution suggested by the sponsoring powers was exactly followed, the only upset in the agreed "list" of candidates of the Western permanent members being that Australia was elected instead of Canada to the British Commonwealth seat. Australia's candidacy had been championed by New Zealand in the first General Assembly, based on the argument that there needed to be a voice on the Security Council from "the South and Southwest Pacific."[16]

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China expressed concern that precedents were being set here:

> . . . while the distribution of the six non-permanent seats as confirmed by the election shows that regard has been given to the principle of geographical representation, along with other necessary qualifications, it should not be considered as constituting in any sense a permanent pattern for the application of this important principle consecrated by Article 23 of the Charter. There are other regions in the world which are not given non-permanent representation on the Security Council. The continent of Asia is one of such regions . . . If it be interpreted that any vacancy created by the retirement from the Council of a member belonging to a given group or region should always be filled by another member of the same group or region, the consequence would be that states which are not members of that group or region would always be excluded from obtaining a place on the Council. Such a situation would obviously be contrary to the spirit of the principle of equitable geographical representation . . . The principle of equitable geographical distribution should always be respected.[17]

These sentiments, immediately endorsed in the General Assembly by France, show that the seeds of dissatisfaction with the application of geographical distribution in elections to the Security Council were present at the first General Assembly elections.

For ECOSOC, the sponsoring powers agreed that states of importance in the economic and social field should be elected, but with the same consideration of unofficial rotation and representation of the different regions to apply in practice. The UK suggested in 1945 that "the eventual admission to the UN of advanced or large states such as Sweden, Italy, Spain and Switzerland will increase the pressure on elections. Some 'weighted' sort of formal or informal system of geographical representation will no doubt have to be devised."[18]

The first elections to ECOSOC also went according to plan, with the 18 seats being divided up as follows: the five Security Council permanent members plus two from Western Europe, two from the British Commonwealth, four from Latin America, two from the Near East and three from Eastern Europe.

Equitable Geographic Distribution

While "Gentlemen's Agreements" and electoral slates helped create precedents for later electoral groups, the sponsoring powers also contributed to the system's legal foundations by specifying "equitable geographical distribution" as a criterion for elections to the Security Council under Article 23(1) of the Charter.

Initially, the original Dumbarton Oaks proposals contained no such guidance criteria for elections. Canada sought the addition of a reference to states' contributions to peace and security, as part of its efforts to secure recognition of a third category of "middle powers" in the Charter. These

wider efforts were opposed by General Jan Christiaan Smuts of South Africa who feared "violent gate-crashing" for this proposed new category. He pointed to the problems that had befallen the League over Brazil's opposition to German permanent membership and Brazil's subsequent withdrawal from the League upon being offered only a "middle powers" type semi-permanent seat. He proposed, and it was accepted, that recognition to middle powers be given through actual practice rather than a formal new category. Other states proposed adding "geographical distribution" to the text.[19] It was Vyacheslav M. Molotov of the USSR who resolved the matter by proposing that "contribution" be given a primary, and "geography" a secondary and intentionally lesser, billing in the Charter.[20] Following further consultations amongst the four sponsoring powers, this was then submitted by them as an amendment to their Dumbarton Oaks proposals to the San Francisco Conference.[21]

When the first meetings of the United Nations Conference on International Organization were held in San Francisco to address the structure and procedures of the proposed Security Council, a number of other criteria were also considered: full equality for all members; rotation; population; industrial and economic capacity; future contributions in armed forces and assistance pledged by each member state; contributions rendered in the Second World War; and the special assignment of seats to certain groups of nations. However, after much debate, and after nine states had unsuccessfully pressed for the expansion of the Security Council to 15 members to allow for greater representation, the Conference decided to maintain the amended wording proposed by the sponsoring powers.[22]

The phrase "equitable geographical distribution" has been used as guidance that electoral groups, roughly proportional to membership and usually but not exclusively based on geography, should be established or maintained. In practice, while the concept of "equitable geographical distribution" has been the primary consideration in the *distribution* of elected seats on UN bodies, concepts of "contribution" and "power" have been equally or more important in the selection of candidates *from within groups* to fill this distribution. At times the phrase "equitable geographical representation" is used (often inaccurately) as a synonym for "equitable geographical distribution." Apart from the functional differences in the use of the words, the increasing use of the term, which appeared in the enabling resolution to expand the Security Council in 1963 and after, has reflected an emphasis on *intent* – an identification that certain groups of states felt, or were, excluded. In a subtle way it marks homogeneity, whereas "distribution" is blind to the internal composition of a grouping.

Evolution of UN Electoral Groups, 1946-63

This period was marked by two major geopolitical trends – the intensification of the Cold War and decolonization.

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The initial effects of the Cold War on Eastern European representation on UN bodies have been addressed above. As East-West relations declined further, the United States in 1947 sought to have the Western European seats in the Security Council and ECOSOC described as "Northern, Western and Southern Europe" and the Eastern European seat as "Eastern and Central Europe." Such semantic changes, backed up by solid voting majorities, facilitated Greece and Turkey's subsequent elections to the Eastern Europe seat on the Security Council at the expense of Communist bloc members.[23]

From the Bandung Conference in 1955 onwards, increasing Third World solidarity helped change both the character and the majoritarian arithmetic of the General Assembly. Decolonization paved the way for multiple admissions into the organization of states from Asia in 1955 and Africa in 1960. The initial membership of the UN had been far from universal. In addition to the direct exclusion of the Axis powers, vast parts of Asia and Africa were only indirectly represented at San Francisco, either as dominions, or indirectly represented by the colonial offices of major powers. These new UN Member States were thus left with scant opportunities for election to UN bodies provided for by the Gentlemen's Agreements of 1946 – one seat for the Near East and Africa on both Councils and, for a select few, the British Commonwealth seats.

Consequent pressure from the Afro-Asian states for better representation took three forms: the raiding of the seats allocated to other regions, pressure for expansion of UN organs, and attempts to lay down new and formal agreements for the distribution of seats on UN bodies.

a) Raids were achieved through forcing, through electoral stand-offs, the sharing of two-year terms of office on the Security Council between the Afro-Asian and other groups.[24] At first raids were made, with Western voting assistance, on the Eastern European seat. Subsequent raids were made on both the Eastern and Western seats when Liberia and Ireland shared a seat in 1961–62. In 1961 Africa, Asia and Latin America together held five of the six elected seats on the Council.
b) Pressure for expansion was frustrated during the years 1956 to 1963 largely because the Soviet Union threatened not to ratify any amendments while the PRC remained unseated on the Security Council, but was finally achieved in 1965.
c) The Afro-Asian states sought formal recognition of a new UN electoral group distribution.

Under the last category, a significant step was taken on 12 December 1957. Three caucus groups, Asian-African, Soviet and Latin American, united to negotiate and vote for General Assembly resolution 1192 (XII) which laid down the first formal distribution pattern for seats on the General Committee. Seats were allocated to Asian-African states, Latin America, and Eastern Europe; and a new category of "Western Europe and other *countries*" *(sic)* was created by the addition of the US, Australia, Canada, New Zealand,

and South Africa as the "Others." This was against the wishes both of the "Others" who wished to retain British Commonwealth representation, and of the Western Europeans. France objected strongly to the wording of this resolution. It stated that the phrase

> 'Western Europe and other countries' in . . . the draft resolution bore no relation to facts. The European group, which did not exist, had never held caucuses with the Commonwealth countries, the United States, or any other countries. The expression 'Western Europe and other countries' was an invention of the sponsors of the joint draft.[25]

Despite such objections, General Assembly resolution 1192 (XII) was the first and perhaps the most significant step in the creation of the modern electoral group configuration.

Evolution of Individual Groups

The British Commonwealth "group" had begun with six states – the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, and pre-independence India. By 1957 Ceylon, Pakistan and Ghana had been added and, with decolonization, the numbers in the Commonwealth group grew rapidly with the admission of more states from Asia and Africa. Resolution 1192 (XII) marked the "beginning of the end" of the Commonwealth as an electoral grouping, with its members being forced to consider relocation to either the Africa-Asia, the Latin America or the Western Europe and Others groups. This process of reallocation and relocation was not completed, however, until 1965, with the expansion of the Security Council and ECOSOC. Whilst the Commonwealth group had become heterodox in terms of geography, culture, political approach, and levels of economic development, its effective replacement, the "Western Europe and Others" group (WEOG), was still geographically diverse, but was more homogeneous on the other fronts.

The 1957 resolution on the General Committee also eliminated the "Middle East" seat. The core of this group in 1945 had been five members of the Arab League: Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. This core grew as more Arab League members joined the organization: Yemen in 1947; Jordan, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia in 1955; and Sudan in 1956. Because Morocco and Tunisia were not members of the Arab League when they were first admitted to the United Nations, they were initially marginalized in the caucusing group. Most electoral distributions also included Ethiopia, Iran, Liberia and Turkey in this electoral category, but only Turkey had much electoral success in the wake of the strength of the Arab League caucus. While the Middle East seat disappeared, the Arab League members became important actors within the wider Asia-African grouping.

Western Europe had never functioned as a cohesive grouping but had two active sub-groups, the Scandinavian (Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and

Sweden) and Benelux (Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) caucusing groups.
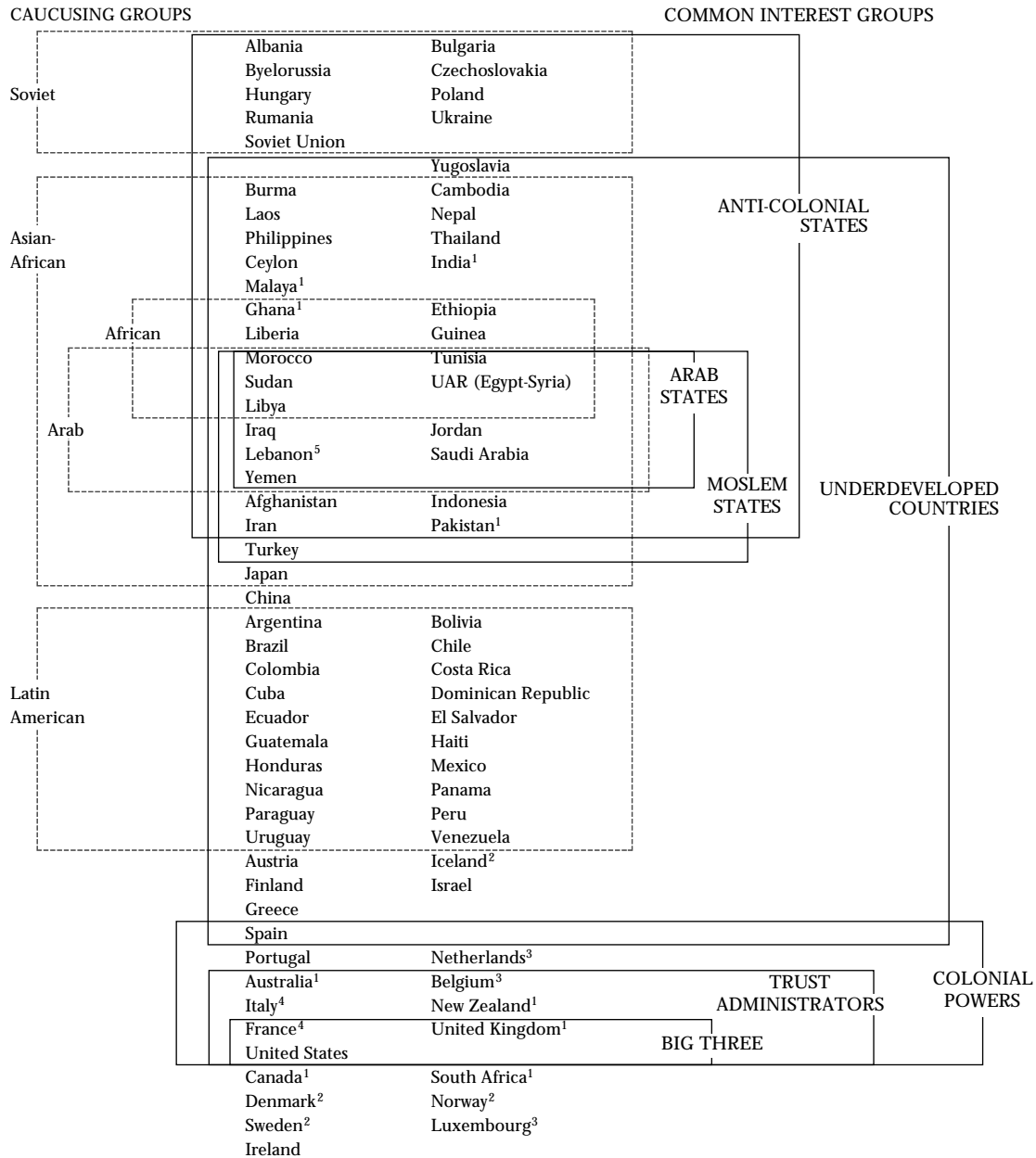
In the case of Eastern Europe, the voting of the caucusing bloc was largely led and dictated by the Soviet Union. The nucleus of the bloc was formed when Byelorussia and the Ukraine were admitted as founding members of the UN in addition to the Soviet Union. Yugoslavia and Poland were initially part of the caucusing group and became part of a more centralized Soviet "bloc" when Cominform (the Communist Information Bureau) was established in 1947. In 1948 Czechoslovakia joined, following the coup in that country. In the same year Yugoslavia broke with the Cominform, and was later to play a major role in the Non-Aligned Movement. Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Rumania joined the United Nations in December 1955 and the bloc, but Albania was later to shift political allegiance to the People's Republic of China, becoming its virtual proxy in the UN system whilst the latter remained unrepresented in the organization. The membership of Eastern Europe as an electoral group remained highly contested in the first twenty years of the UN, with the Soviet Union viewing it as consisting of Soviet-friendly communist states only and the West attempting to recast the group as geographically based, to include Greece and Turkey. Yugoslavia, after its political shift, remained a member of the electoral group. Finland was also included in this group for electoral purposes, but it, too, was not part of the caucusing group.[26]

The Latin American electoral grouping was unique in retaining the same membership up until the expansion of the Councils, when it embraced some of the Caribbean states. As new members joined the UN, however, its 20 members (see table 1 for a list) formed a diminishing proportion of total UN membership. Table 1 gives a snapshot of both Caucusing and Geographical distribution groups at the start of the XIVth General Assembly Session in 1959.

Expansion of the General Committee, Security Council and ECOSOC, and Creation of Present Group System

The expansion of the Security Council and ECOSOC (initiated in 1963, effected in 1965) was a major step in the further official recognition and codification of the system of UN electoral groups. The formal distribution of seats was addressed differently in the two Councils. The enabling UNGA Resolution [1991(A)] for the Security Council contained a proposed distribution of all 10 of the non-permanent seats: five for Africa and Asia, two for Latin America, two for Western Europe and Other States, and one for Eastern Europe. The UNGA Resolution for ECOSOC [1991(B)] detailed only the distribution of the nine new members (seven from Africa and Asia, one from Latin America and one from Western Europe and Other States). It was not until UNGA resolution 2847 (XXVI) of 20 December 1971, when ECOSOC was further expanded, that a pattern for the election of all

Table 1: Caucusing and Geographic Distribution Groups at the Start of the XIVth General Assembly Session in 1959

CAUCUSING GROUPS   COMMON INTEREST GROUPS

Soviet

Albania	Bulgaria
Byelorussia	Czechoslovakia
Hungary	Poland
Rumania	Ukraine
Soviet Union	
Yugoslavia	

ANTI-COLONIAL STATES

Asian-African

Burma	Cambodia
Laos	Nepal
Philippines	Thailand
Ceylon	India[1]
Malaya[1]	

African

Ghana[1]	Ethiopia
Liberia	Guinea
Morocco	Tunisia
Sudan	UAR (Egypt-Syria)
Libya	

ARAB STATES

Arab

Iraq	Jordan
Lebanon[5]	Saudi Arabia
Yemen	

MOSLEM STATES

Afghanistan	Indonesia
Iran	Pakistan[1]
Turkey	

UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES

| Japan | |
| China | |

Latin American

Argentina	Bolivia
Brazil	Chile
Colombia	Costa Rica
Cuba	Dominican Republic
Ecuador	El Salvador
Guatemala	Haiti
Honduras	Mexico
Nicaragua	Panama
Paraguay	Peru
Uruguay	Venezuela

Austria	Iceland[2]
Finland	Israel
Greece	
Spain	

Portugal	Netherlands[3]
Australia[1]	Belgium[3]
Italy[4]	New Zealand[1]
France[4]	United Kingdom[1]
United States	

TRUST ADMINISTRATORS

COLONIAL POWERS

BIG THREE

Canada[1]	South Africa[1]
Denmark[2]	Norway[2]
Sweden[2]	Luxembourg[3]
Ireland	

1. Member of Commonwealth caucusing group
2. Member of Scandinavian caucusing group
3. Member of both the Benelux and Western European caucusing groups
4. Member of Western European caucusing group
5. Lebanon might not be considered a "Moslem" state because the population is about equally divided between Moslems and Christians, with a slight Christian majority.

Comparison of membership in common interest groups and caucusing groups

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ECOSOC seats was formally adopted in a resolution. The other differences in 1971 from the 1963 expansions were the formal separation of African from Asian states and the designation of seats to the "socialist states of eastern Europe" to preempt any future attempt to raid the seats of the socialist bloc.[27]

The expansion of the General Committee on 16 December 1963 was also a step towards the enfranchisement of all regional groups, since the Annex to the resolution specified that all committee members, including the General Assembly Presidency, were subject to equitable geographic rotation.[28] Previously there had been an informal agreement by the other groups to exclude Eastern European candidates from the post, with the result, according to the Ambassador of the USSR, that during the election of the President, "all eyes were studiously lowered as soon as any representative of the East European area came into view."[29]

The resolutions to expand the Security Council and ECOSOC were approved by the General Assembly in December 1963 but not ratified by the required number of states until August 1965. During the intervening period, considerable debate took place over the significance of the resolutions for the proposed "Western European and Other States" group. The 1957 resolution that removed Commonwealth representation from the General Committee had been passed under protest from the Western European and old Commonwealth states – those that would be affected the most by the change. Since these states did not "recognize" the new grouping foisted upon them, the resolution did not immediately reshape the system of electoral groups. Nevertheless, states from Western Europe and the Old Commonwealth did meet informally between 1957 and 1963 to negotiate nominations for General Assembly vice presidencies (i.e., General Committee membership). When the General Assembly resolutions to expand the two councils were passed, it was agreed that Commonwealth Caribbean states such as Jamaica and Trinidad would join with the Latin American group for both caucusing and electoral purposes. Cyprus requested to join, and was accepted by, the Asian-African group, but was later also to continue to attend meetings of WEOG. Yugoslavia remained in an ambiguous position between East and West, and was not invited to many of the important "informal" meetings held by the West Europeans.

Initially Canada had contemplated joining the Latin American group (potentially renamed a Western Hemisphere group). Both Australia and New Zealand felt split between Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. In December 1960, New Zealand had expressed the view that the disadvantages of joining the Western European group far outweighed the advantages. This was because it would "impair the image which we have endeavoured to present of New Zealand as a country of the South Pacific with European and Commonwealth connections."[30] By July 1962 this was being reconsidered and, if the Commonwealth seat was lost, joining WEOG was seen as inevitable even if not wholly desirable. Australia had entertained similar thoughts about joining the Asian group with a view to being part of a future Pacific sub-

group. By April 1964 Australia, New Zealand and Canada all saw clear advantages in joining with the Western European states.

Their entry into this category was brought to the fore by the question of the status of Israel. On 3 April 1964, the Australian ambassador to the UN in New York wrote:

> Israel has this year formally written to the "Western European and Other States" asking their support for Israel's candidature for a Vice-Presidency of the forthcoming General Assembly session . . . Since some members of the Western European group do not want to regard Israel as one of the "Other States," this candidature has precipitated the question of just who are the "Other States." We can detect no disposition among the West Europeans to exclude Australia, Canada, and New Zealand from the category – indeed it would be difficult for them to do so in view of Australia's Vice-Presidencies in 1958 and 1962, and Canada's in 1960. But Israel is quite another matter, as is South Africa (though South Africa was elected to a Vice-Presidency in 1959 from the "Western European and Other States" category). The Western Europeans consequently are anxious to establish the right to decide for themselves just who are the "Other States" and . . . therefore want to turn the category "Western European and Other States" into a formally-defined and functioning electoral group. [31]

Five days later he was able to report to Canberra that the Western European group had met and had taken a "definite decision that the "Other States" sub-category is limited to Australia, Canada and New Zealand and does not include either Israel or South Africa."[32] Sir Patrick Dean, the British Permanent Representative, had said that the group justified this decision on the grounds that Australia, Canada and New Zealand were

> obviously not part of any recognised geographical group, but that Israel was geographically part of the Middle East and came within the Asian category, while South Africa was geographically part of Africa . . . It was no concern of the West European group if neither Israel nor South Africa, because of the policies each followed, could expect ever to be a candidate from its geographical group.[33]

This decision meant that Australia, Canada and New Zealand were at liberty to declare themselves automatic members of the WEOG category, if they so wished. Later that year, all three did so.

After 1965 the Asian group continued to grow, both proportionally and in actual numbers, creating a vast and internally heterodox group. In recent years the ranks of the Asian group were swelled by both Pacific Island states and some of the newly independent republics of the former Soviet Union. Its diverse membership has meant that it has remained largely an electoral rather than a caucusing group.[34] Latin America was joined by a number of Caribbean states through the new 1963 distributions, and more joined later upon gaining independence. The creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 saw the culmination of attempts to reassert African unity damaged by the Congolese civil war, which had created the Casablanca, Brazzaville and Monrovia caucusing blocs. Africa separated from the Asian

states and began developing its sophisticated system of rotation involving five sub-regional electoral groups, combined with arrangements for representation of Arab states in partnership with the Asian group, known colloquially as the Arab "swing" seat.

The WEOG has seen a recent move toward economic and political integration by its European Union (EU) core, creating a more united caucus among these states, with potential electoral consequences for the non-core members. The Eastern European group, like Asia, has grown recently from the addition of former Soviet republics. Initially some of these former republics sought to join WEOG, but most now appear to see advantages in the continuation of the Eastern European grouping.

Lessons to be Learned from the Past

The fundamental changes to UN electoral groups from 1945 to 1963 emerged from:

a) significant changes in the UN system (the entry of many new states from Africa and Asia into the UN);
b) dissatisfaction with the status quo amongst those who felt excluded from the process; and
c) the political willingness and available means to secure change.

Two methods were used in concert to achieve change. The first was the exertion of the political will of the majority (made possible because of emergent Third World solidarity) on a dissenting minority. This occurred in the raiding of seats under the previous "Gentleman's Agreement" (to which the new members had no part in agreeing), and in the formal redistribution of General Committee seats through a General Assembly vote against the express wishes of one group of states. The second was negotiation leading to Charter amendment and both expansion and redistribution of the councils' seats. The second method worked only because those regions that proportionally lost out either gained in other ways or saw the agreement arrived at as better than some of the potential alternatives. Agreement on Charter amendment was reached in part because of the continuing threat of redistribution.

Are There Parallel Pressures Today?

Membership has increased significantly since the expansion of the Security Council in 1963 and ECOSOC in 1971. (See table 3.) This has reduced the opportunities for election to these bodies. Given the logjam in the General Assembly *Open-ended Working Group*[35] negotiations, some states may see benefits in changes to the system of electoral groups, or at least intra-group

Table 2: UN Members by Region, 1 April 1999

Eastern Europe (21)

Albania	Croatia	Moldova	The former Yugoslav
Armenia	Czech Republic	Poland	Republic of Macedonia
Azerbaijan	Georgia	Romania	Ukraine
Belarus	Hungary	Russian Federation	Yugoslavia (some rights of
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Latvia	Slovak Republic	membership in suspense)
Bulgaria	Lithuania	Slovenia	

Western Europe and other States (27)

Andorra	France	Luxembourg	San Marino
Australia	Germany	Malta	Spain
Austria	Greece	Monaco	Sweden
Belgium	Iceland	Netherlands	Turkey
Canada	Ireland	New Zealand	United Kingdom
Denmark	Italy	Norway	United States
Finland	Liechtenstein	Portugal	

Latin America and Caribbean (33)

Antigua and Barbuda	Costa Rica	Haiti	Saint Christopher and
Argentina	Cuba	Honduras	Nevis
Bahamas	Dominica	Jamaica	Saint Lucia
Barbados	Dominican Republic	Mexico	Saint Vincent and the
Belize	Ecuador	Nicaragua	Grenadines
Bolivia	El Salvador	Panama	Suriname
Brazil	Grenada	Paraguay	Trinidad and Tobago
Chile	Guatemala	Peru	Uruguay
Colombia	Guyana		Venezuela

Asia (48)

Afghanistan	Iran	Mongolia	Sri Lanka
Bahrain	Iraq	Myanmar	Syria
Bangladesh	Japan	Nepal	Tajikistan
Bhutan	Jordan	Oman	Thailand
Brunei-Darassalam	Kazakhstan	Pakistan	Turkmenistan
Cambodia	Kuwait	Papua New Guinea	United Arab Emirates
China	Kyrgyzstan	Philippines	Uzbekistan
Cyprus	Laos	Qatar	Vanuatu
Democratic People's	Lebanon	Republic of Korea	Viet Nam
Republic of Korea	Malaysia	Samoa	Yemen
Fiji	Maldives	Saudi Arabia	
India	Marshall Islands	Singapore	
Indonesia	Micronesia	Solomon Islands	

Africa (53)

Algeria	Egypt	Malawi	Somalia
Angola	Equitorial Guinea	Mali	South Africa
Benin	Eritrea	Mauritania	Sudan
Botswana	Ethiopia	Mauritius	Swaziland
Burkina Faso	Gabon	Morocco	Tanzania
Burundi	Gambia	Mozambique	Togo
Cameroon	Ghana	Namibia	Tunisia
Cape Verde	Guinea	Niger	Uganda
Central African Republic	Guinea-Bissau	Nigeria	Zaire (DRC)
Chad	Kenya	Rwanda	Zambia
Comoros	Lesotho	Sao Tome and Principe	Zimbabwe
Congo	Liberia	Senegal	
Cote d'Ivoire	Libya	Seychelles	
Dijibouti	Madagascar	Sierra Leone	

States not currently members of a UN regional group (3)

Estonia	Israel	Palau

Note: Based on UN Groupings used for electoral purposes.

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changes to allow them greater electoral opportunities. In both the 52nd and 53rd General Assembly sessions, Australia and New Zealand (both WEOG members) called for a debate on electoral group reconfiguration. These calls were supported by an Asian state, Fiji, at the 53rd session.[36] Bahrain and Lebanon, both of them jointly Arab and Asian states, have argued that Arab countries, which represent 12 per cent of the general membership of the UN, are underrepresented on the Security Council. While expressing concerns over Arab representation's reliance on "a so-called gentlemen's agreement" between the Asian and African electoral groups, both stopped short of linking this to advocacy of electoral group reconfiguration.[37]

Table 3: Changing Membership of Electoral Groupings, 1945–99

	Percentage of UN Membership		
Group	1945	1967	1999
Africa	8%	33%	29%
Asia	16%	22%	26%
Eastern Europe	12%	8%	11%
Latin America and the Caribbean	39%	19%	18%
Western Europe and Others	25%	17%	15%

* Current membership of groups: Africa 53, Asia 48, Eastern Europe 21, Latin America and the Caribbean 33, Western Europe and Others 27.

Only three states are not presently members of an electoral group. Estonia, while eligible for membership of the East European group, is waiting first to see if it can be accepted into WEOG. Israel, whose natural home is the Asian group, would not presently be accepted by some members of that group. Since admission to groups by tradition requires consensus, it is unlikely that this would change for some time. Israel has made informal approaches to WEOG for "temporary" membership until its acceptance in the Asian group. These approaches have so far been unsuccessful. The position of Palau is unclear, with the 1997 and 1998 editions of the authoritative New Zealand Government *UN Handbook* including it under Asia, but the 1999 edition of the Handbook excluding it. South Africa had previously been excluded from the group system, but after the end of apartheid was welcomed into the African group.

Whether dissatisfaction will remain localized within groups, or whether states across electoral groups (e.g., Caribbean and Central American, South Pacific Forum, Arab, or other Asian states, Eastern European states, and "Others" in WEOG) would see benefit in taking a joint initiative, remains to be seen.

It is easy to envisage new regional groupings and sub-groupings, but the ramification of such changes, and their consequent desirability, depends upon wider factors. The composition, size and division of electoral groups have meaning only in the context of the bodies to which they elect. More specifically, they are meaningful in relation to such bodies' function and purpose, the electoral seats available as a proportion of total size, the nature of candidates from other groups, the modalities of election to the bodies, and their voting modalities and voting thresholds in the light of the political complexion of their membership.

Thus, at least five questions can usefully be asked of any proposal for change:

1. What is the proportion and nature of the seats designated for groups and sub-groups and the modalities of their election?
2. What is the external political environment (e.g., East-West relations; areas of North-South cooperation and conflict; regional financial crises; developments in cultural, political and economic homogeneity within and across regions)?
3. What is the nature of the decisions taken by the bodies onto which group members are elected, and how is functionalism being squared with the concept of proportional representation of geographical regions based on the "one state, one vote" principle?

   In other words, how should the function of a body, whether it is concerned with peace, development or any other subject, influence the type of states elected on to it? In theory, but not in practice, the Charter asserts that functionalism comes first in the Security Council and geographical distribution after. In many UN bodies the application of geographical representation has grown stronger, and the formal institutionalization of the five regional electoral categories can be seen in bodies as diverse as the UN Commission on International Trade Law and the Committee on Conferences. At the same time, we have seen increasing importance given to negotiations within the framework of organizations such as the Bretton Woods Institutions, where functional assumptions and weighted voting outweigh geographical considerations.
4. How are powerful states (however defined) being addressed in this electoral context?

   Should they be dealt with by electoral sub-agreements within regional electoral groups? Should they be elevated outside of their electoral group into their own single or shared category? The permanent members in the League Council and UN Security Council were thus elevated. There have been a number of proposals to this effect within the General Assembly *Open-ended Working Group*. Adding new permanent members is the most obvious, but other proposals include shared seats for Brazil and Argentina; changes to the modalities of election of 30 or so medium-sized states; and that elusive creature, the shared regional permanent seat.[38]

Elevation of Security Council permanent members often extends to elections to other bodies. Under an informal agreement, named the "permanent member convention" by the five and the "cascade effect" by its detractors, the five were traditionally automatically elected to other UN bodies. A number of exceptions to this informal agreement have arisen in recent years. Should the permanent five be counted as members of the five electoral groups for purposes of assessing proportionality in seat allocation? What are the merits and disadvantages of their elevation under the convention?

5. Finally, what is the proposed negotiation process, and what are the proposed modalities for change, for bringing about the new electoral group system?

If a consensus route is planned, what are the gains for all parties, and the terms of linkages to other issue areas? If a minority will remain disgruntled, what will be the political fallout?

Notes

1 George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), p. 260.
2 By means of the Annex to General Assembly resolution 1192 (XII) of 12 December 1957.
3 Africa; Asia; Eastern Europe; Latin America and the Caribbean; and Western Europe and Other States.
4 This focus is appropriate because the system of UN electoral groups has evolved largely as a consequence of the need to elect states to these three bodies, and has been formalized as a byproduct of resolutions concerned with their expansion. This cause and effect relationship is described in the *United Nations Handbook 1998* (Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1998). "[The GA electoral group system] . . . is unofficial and *has been developed to take account of the purposes of* GA Res. 1991 (XVIII) (1963), 33/138 (1978) and 2847 (XXVI) 1971," p. 18 (emphasis added).

   One other significant area where geographical distribution plays a part is in appointments to the UN Secretariat. Article 101 of the UN Charter requires that "Due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible." In practice, other factors such as the financial contribution of states and permanent five membership are also significant. In any case, the basis for Secretariat appointments is beyond the scope of this paper.
5 These include regional organizations and alliances such as the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), geopolitical groupings such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), groups based on level of development such as the G77, trading/political blocs such as the European Union (EU), and even common language groupings of states. For more detailed analysis of UN political groupings, see Sydney D. Bailey and Sam Daws, *The Procedure of the United Nations Security Council* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 168-173.
6 Thomas Hovet, Jr., *Bloc Politics in the United Nations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 2.
7 Ibid., pp. 2–4.
8 Report to the 2nd Assembly, League of Nations Document A.9. (1921) p. 64. Cited in David Armstrong, Lorna Lloyd and John Redmond, *From Versailles to Maastricht – International Organization in the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 56, n80.
9 Public Record Office (PRO), Kew, London. Dominion Office Papers DO 35/1887 (Secret), Reconstruction Department, 9 November 1945. "Draft memorandum: Elections to Security Council and Economic and Social Council," n1.

10 Article 4 of The Covenant of the League of Nations (28 June 1919) stated that:

The Council shall consist of Representatives of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers, together with Representatives of Four other Members of the League . . . [to be] selected by the Assembly from time to time in its discretion . . . With the approval of the majority of the Assembly the Council may name additional Members of the League whose Representatives shall always be members of the Council; the Council with like approval may increase the number of members of the League to be selected by the Assembly for representation on the Council.

Source: Franz Knipping, Hans von Mangoldt and Volker Rittberger *The United Nations System and its Predecessors: Volume II* (Oxford University Press, 1997); "The Covenant of the League of Nations" (pp. 201–02). For details of changes in the size of the permanent, semi-permanent and non-permanent representation on the League Council, see Knipping et al., "Rules of Procedure of the Council. Amendments" (p. 235). By contrast, in the case of the UN, Charter amendment was needed to alter the size of the Security Council and Economic and Social Council.

11 United States National Archives (USNA), College Park, Maryland. RG 59/250/49/11/02 Box 49 (Confidential), Position Papers, Bureau of International Organization Affairs and its Predecessors, File SD/Gen 38, 3D/Charter 24. Elective Representation in the Security Council, 20 October 1949, p. 6.

12 Ibid., pp. 3-4. Of these nine states, Chile and Czechoslovakia were elected to ECOSOC. Only Iran missed out on a seat.

13 PRO. DO 35/1887, A.C.U. (45) 75 (Secret), December 1945, Candidates for election to the Security Council and ECOSOC.

14 The US position was finalized at meetings of the US delegation held on board the ship *The Queen Elizabeth*, as the delegation travelled to the first General Assembly session in London in January 1946. Care was taken during these meetings to produce proposed slates that would comply with US interests but would also be "reasonable" in the light of equitable geographic distribution. In the early meetings on board the ship, the term "Middle East" was used. Seven months later, as consideration was given to the 2nd set of General Assembly elections, this had been replaced with "Near and Middle East and Africa." See *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1946: Volume I, General; The United Nations*, pp. 117-33 and 197-99.

15 USNA. State Department Central Files. RG 59/250/49/15/1-2 Box 21. "Preliminary recommended slates of non-permanent members of the Security Council for the next five years beginning January 1, 1948. Geographical Distribution of Non-Permanent Members." 18 February 1947.

16 General Assembly *Official Records*, 1st Session, 5th Plenary meeting, 12 January 1946, p. 65.

17 General Assembly *Official Records*, 1st Session, 5th Plenary meeting, 12 January 1946, pp. 75–76. It is notable that in the original (English) version of Wellington Koo's speech, "equitable geographical representation" and "equitable geographical distribution" are used interchangeably, although UN Charter Article 23 refers only to the latter. Many diplomats and academics have followed in his wake. The French translation by the Secretariat of Koo's speech uses the same phrase, "le principe d'une repartition geographique equitable," as the translation in both cases.

18 PRO. DO 35/1887, A.C.U. (45) 75 (Secret), December 1945, Candidates for election to the Security Council and ECOSOC, p. 5.

19 PRO. Premier 4/30/10. War Cabinet Papers. W.P. (45) 205 (Secret), 31 March 1945, "World Organisation: Non-permanent membership of the Security Council," Memorandum by Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.

20 USNA, RG 59/250/49/11/02 Box 49 (Confidential), Position Papers, Bureau of International Organization Affairs and its Predecessors, File SD/Gen 38, 3D/Charter 24. Elective Representation in the Security Council, 20 October 1949.

21 USNA, RG 59/250/46/24/01 Box 210 Records of Harley A. Notter 1939-45, Box 210. US Declaration – San Francisco Conference (Top Secret) (Declassified). Telegram. To: Acting Secretary, Washington for attn of The President. From: Secretary. 4 May 1945.

22 The nine states were Lebanon, Venezuela, Iran, Iraq, Chile, Egypt, El Salvador, Colombia and Liberia. See United Nations Conference on International Organization. *Official Records*. Commission III, Committee 1, III/1/3, Doc. 120. 6 May 1945.

23 USNA. State Department Central Files. RG 59/250/49/15/1-2, Box 21. "Preliminary recommended slates of non-permanent members of the Security Council for the next five years beginning January 1, 1948. Geographical Distribution of Non-Permanent Members." 18 February 1947.

24 Although this was not envisaged in the Charter, it was also not illegal if a state agreed to resign its seat voluntarily after one year, producing an election for another state to fill the remainder of the term.

25 UNGA Official Records, 12th Session, Special Political Committee, 80th Meeting, 9 Dec 1957, page 169. The term "Western Europe and other countries" in the draft resolution adopted by the Special Political Committee was later changed to "Western Europe and Other States" in GA Resolution 1192 (XII). See A/SPC/L.22 and L.23, 6 Dec 1957; and A/L.242 and A/3781, 11 Dec 1957.

26 Hovet, *Bloc Politics*, pp. 47-48.

27 Bruno Simma, *The Charter of the United Nations: A Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 396 and pp. 831–32.

28 A/5675, 16 December 1963, Annex, p. 1.

29 General Assembly *Official Records* 18th Session, 1285th Plenary Meeting, 17 December 1963, p. 8. Of the first thirteen General Assembly Presidents, five were from Western Europe and the British Commonwealth, five from Asia and Africa, three from Latin America, and none from Eastern Europe. See GAOR 14th Session, Document A/4182, 13 August 1959, p. 1.

30 Australian Archives (AA), Canberra. Department of External Affairs Series A1838/2 Item 901/5/2 Part 3 File: Expansion of the Security Council and ECOSOC. Memorandum from the Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the UN, New York. To: Secretary of External Affairs, Wellington, 27 July 1962. Contains reference to December 1960 telegram. p. 6.

31 AA, Series A1838/2 Item 901/5/2 Part 5. File No. 159/3. Memorandum No. 541/64, 3 April 1964, From: The Permanent Representative, Australian Mission to the UN, New York. To: Secretary, Department of External Affairs, Canberra, pp. 4–5.

32 Ibid. Memorandum No. 545/64, 8 April 1964, From: The Permanent Representative, Australian Mission to the UN, New York. To: Secretary, Department of External Affairs, Canberra, p1. Emphasis in quotation is in the original.

33 Ibid.

34 Lebanon, however, has argued that the Asian group does discuss substantive issues in the course of its meetings on the representation of the group in subsidiary organs of ECOSOC. UN General Assembly *Official Records*, A/53/PV.65, 20 November 1998, p. 18.

35 Its full title is the General Assembly *Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Security Council.*

36 UN General Assembly *Official Records* 52nd Session: A/52/PV.15, 29 September 1997, New Zealand; A/52/PV.23, 3 October 1997, Australia. 53rd Session: A/43/PV., 22 September 1998, Australia, A/53/PV.64, 20 November 1998, Fiji, p. 12, New Zealand, p. 14.

37 UN General Assembly *Official Records* 53rd Session, A/53/PV.65, 20 November 1998, Lebanon, p. 18. A/53/PV.66, 23 November 1999, Bahrain, p. 3.

38 See Sam Daws, "Seeking Seats, Votes and Vetoes" *The World Today* 53 (October 1997), pp. 256–59.

ELECTORAL GROUP RECONFIGURATION AND PRESENT DAY REALITIES

Terence O'Brien, Director, Centre for Strategic Studies, New Zealand

Reform of the composition and configuration of the UN electoral groups does not much feature in the debate, discourse or literature about revitalizing the UN. This is hardly surprising. Alongside the larger and inveterate issues of Secretariat reform, of budgetary change, of programme coordination in the economic and social domains, of revitalizing the work of the General Assembly and of revising the composition of the Security Council, the matter is not deemed, obviously, to warrant comparable attention. It concerns the very coalface of the UN system, and for many, especially those outside that system, assumes the dimension of subterranean matter.

Moreover the need for change and improvement in the electoral groups depends, in part, upon the vantage point (or the electoral group) from where the issue is addressed. What follows here is, obviously, one perspective only. But this contribution is grounded in a belief that attainable improvements in the composition and configuration of the groups, which requires no substantial Charter change, could be a catalyst for wider improvement in the UN system.

There will certainly be those who see no advantage in changing the electoral group system inside the UN. A narrow view of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" may influence those countries that calculate they do well enough from the group system as it is presently configured. It is important, therefore, that the present proposals do not disadvantage, or degrade, the prospects of any country beneath what presently is available under the existing system. This paper would indeed assert just such claim for the proposals it makes. It would assert, too, that the wider potential of the suggested reconfiguration would help fix, or improve, parts of the UN system which, if not broke, stand in dire need of improvement to make the UN relevant to the new century.

Electoral Groups Today

The present five electoral groups[1] are the product of decisions by the UN General Assembly over the years to facilitate the election of countries and

office holders to the principal institutions, governing bodies and chairman-ships of the UN system, including the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which are subject to decision in New York (specialized agencies and other UN bodies elsewhere conduct their own elections according to separate and different electoral groups).

The present five groups were formalized in 1964 when earlier arrange-ments were modified by the General Assembly. UN membership at that time totalled 118.[2] Over the ensuing three decades, the admission of 67 additional members, and their apportionment within the five electoral groups, has produced a lopsided, disparate composition of those groups. In the absence, moreover, of commensurate remodelling of office holding entitlements, notably with respect to the non-permanent seats of the Security Council, relative equity between the entitlements of the groups has been compro-mised. The result is that the smaller electoral groups enjoy a more favourable equity ratio than the larger groups.

For some analysts, such a situation is an eminently appropriate reflection of power realities in the world. The global order post-1945 was a Eurocentric order, basically because the inspiring architect, the US, wanted it thus.[3] This was exemplified, and is still reflected, in the governance, entitlements and structure of the UN system. Such realities require, it is suggested below, substantive reassessment, however, as they relate to the need for effective multilateralism to manage the deepening challenges of an interdependent world in the new century.

Electoral Groups: Basic Considerations

The essential purpose of the electoral groups, viz. to lend order and equity to the rotation of appointments/elections in the UN system, is being defeated, principally by the growth in UN membership. Theoretically, at least, in keeping with the basic UN Charter principles, equal opportunity should be provided for all UN members, no matter how small, to serve, should they wish, in key institutions of the system on a basis of equitable rotation.[4] Yet in the larger groups (Asia and Africa) the claims to key offices by important regional powers – some of whom (e.g., Japan) are significant contributors to UN budgets – traditionally attract understandable precedence over compet-ing bids from smaller, less powerful, candidates.

Rotational discipline has maintained, at least to some degree, in some cases, a measure of internal group equity, notably in the case of the large African Group. But, by contrast, in the West European and Other Group (WEOG), a much smaller group, there is an evident absence of equivalent discipline that produces a regular pattern of contested candidatures, which obliges the General Assembly to make choices that are invariably awkward.

This basic problem of inequity is compounded in those cases where a country elects to press its candidature, even if the slate of entitlements is contested (i.e., there are more candidates than there are positions available).

This can necessitate a campaign for election that stretches the resources, particularly of smaller countries. And, even in cases where fairness should otherwise conclusively validate a particular bid, a burdensome campaign may yet end in disappointment. The perceived realities of power prevail.

It is far from clear that the architects of the UN Charter envisaged that their creation would produce such outcomes, save perhaps in the most exceptional circumstances. In the case of the UN Security Council, the architects inserted the Charter proviso that non-permanent members should be elected according to "equitable geographical distribution" but did not stipulate how that should be achieved, or even suggest how appropriate geographical groups should be shaped.[5] The result was an anomaly that has grown greater as UN membership itself has accelerated. There exists, for instance, an Asian Group embracing the Middle East, and a West European Group including countries of the Southern Pacific and the Americas. The African Group is twice the size of the East European Group, and the Asian Group, equally, is double that of Western Europe.

The Particular Situation of the European Groups

The relevance of the electoral groups is affected, obviously, by changes in world order beyond the UN. The end of the Cold War transformed that order in profound ways. Of direct bearing on the subject of this paper, there has been consequential expression of interest by certain countries of the East Europe Group in changing to membership of WEOG. Initial overtures were deflected for a period, but changes inside Europe itself – expansion of NATO, and potentially of the EU – to embrace countries which, in UN terms, figure in the East Europe electoral group, are indications of a shift in the real world order that impacts upon the UN electoral group system and enhances the case for modification.

Inside the WEOG, the dominance of European Union members and several "mini states" intimately linked to the EU, plus the logic of common EU foreign policy, is discernible in evidence of promotion (formal or informal) of EU-agreed European candidatures for UN positions. The changes, real and potential, which this implies are substantial reasons in themselves to address the issue of the UN electoral groups and a case for a fresh blueprint for the groups.

Change for Legitimacy's Sake

Equity is the handmaiden of democracy; and democracy is, in a pluralist world, the foundation for legitimacy. Remodelling the composition and configuration of the UN electoral groups can be advanced as a genuine step towards consolidation of legitimacy in and of the UN system, in terms of the Preamble and in Article 2 of the UN Charter, where the principle of equality

between nations and peoples is reaffirmed. For many, reform of the UN must be centred upon both strengthening and democratizing the system.[6] Others reject, however, all connection between democracy at the national level and democratization of multilateral institutions. The realities of power in the world are such that the practices and principles of domestic political institutions should certainly be applied with care to the business of international institution building,[7] although techniques of delegation, of representation and of group voting employed in national legislatures have indeed been repeated with effect at the international level. The thrust of the present ideas is, however, to consolidate UN legitimacy, rather than assert democracy as such.

In the world, now, as the virtues of legitimacy and pluralism are robustly, even intrusively, promoted through major power bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, the anachronism between an ever-democratizing world and a multilateral system where essential legitimacy is disregarded, even disowned, must grow strikingly larger. The topical democratic peace theory argues, for example, that democracies do not fight one another,[8] and injects thereby a beguiling security dimension into what has indeed become a values crusade in support of pluralist governance and individual rights. The theory sidesteps entirely the essential anachronism identified here. It ignores the potentially destabilizing consequences arising from persistent, inequitable multilateralism that disowns its own intrinsic legitimacy in a changing world. Weapons proliferation, terrorism and effective environmental stewardship are three instances, among numerous others, where perceptions of inequitable multilateralism will surely compromise international efforts to address effective, workable solutions – to the detriment of all, the powerful as well as the weak.

The Relevance of Multilateralism

Reality, moreover, denies the realists. Multilateralism is based on certain principles for ordering relations between states. The strength of commitment by great and small powers alike is founded on a pragmatic assumption that a rough equivalence of benefits will accrue over time (so-called "diffuse reciprocity").[9] The UN electoral groups constitute, in terms of this paper, one particular area where the rough equivalence of benefits, or diffuse reciprocity, can be readily tested.

And it needs to be tested against present day multilateral realities. Beginning in the 1980s, there has been a growing realization on the part of major powers and others that it is not possible to construct or extend essential multilateral rules systems (or regimes) without the consent or participation of the non-powerful. Negotiations throughout the 1980s in three areas – the Law of the Sea (LOS), the start-up of trade liberalization under the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the fashioning of new environmental regimes (for example the Montreal

Protocol) – provided solid evidence of a requirement to modify the way multilateral negotiation had been largely accomplished until that point,[10] viz. conclusive pre-negotiation (pre-cooking) amongst a small and powerful group of like-minded nations who then cajoled or obliged the remaining participants to accept their outcome.

The Achilles heel here was that without the cooperation and involvement of the less powerful in actual negotiation, there was always a distinct possibility they would simply resile from the outcome altogether, or try to act as free-riders on whatever result emerged. To obtain their indispensable cooperation in devising rules to order increasingly complex and interdependent global challenges, it was necessary to involve the less powerful in negotiation of the substance of a new bargain and devise governance of the resultant regime in ways that incorporated those countries and their interests. This group of countries, it might be noted, includes the so-called middle powers who operate in multilateral affairs less out of exclusive calculation of national interest than out of a belief in international responsibility.[11]

Such lessons drawn from multilateral experience of the 1980s and beyond must surely constitute a road map for multilateralism of the new century where non-proliferation of weapons, terrorism, multinational crime, drugs, high seas stewardship, ecological protection and sustainable development and a raft of other transnational challenges to international stability and well-being will defy resolution by the old ways of multilateralism (which was, in reality, "minilateralism" among the few and the powerful). The new century will require at least as many codes of behaviour, norms and laws as the one it replaces if the globalization of international relations is to be viewed as an authentic enduring opportunity and not a threat by people and states in the world. The experience and practice of multilateral diplomacy that began to emerge in the 1980s must be replicated, in other words, if the new problems of security and well being are to be effectively managed, let alone resolved, in the century ahead.

Manageability

An abiding criticism of the modern UN system is the sheer unmanageability of a (negotiating) process that involves too many participants. A system with 185 members, it is asserted, simply will not work. A second lesson suggested by the experiences beginning in the 1980s is that the failure, or threat of failure, in negotiation did not, and does not, in fact stem from inefficiencies arising because of the large(r) numbers collaboratively involved in negotiation, but rather from the ultimate defection by large powers from an outcome with which they could not agree.[12]

The US rejection of the negotiated LOS text, one of the most significant additions to international law of the twentieth century, is a prime example, but there are others from a wide field of endeavour – like the international criminal court, the ban on landmines, or international law on ozone layer

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depletion. The evidence suggests, in short, *no* inherent or intrinsic inability to organize cooperation amongst a large number of states and to produce a result, providing inventive techniques of conference management and decision-making are employed.

Reconfiguring the Electoral Groups

The need to enhance the sense amongst countries of equivalence of benefits from multilateralism (the "diffuse reciprocity" mentioned earlier) requires that stakeholding in the integrity of the UN system be constantly nourished. This should be driven less by lofty moral considerations of equity than by sheer hard-nosed interest on the part of the great and the small. One area where the legitimacy of the system can be enhanced, and distortions produced by time corrected, is in the configuration of the UN electoral groups that operate at UN Headquarters. Reconfiguration should have the following aims:

• To improve the prospects for all members that desire the opportunity to play an equitable part in, and make an equitable contribution to, problem-solving in the UN system;
• To achieve this through expansion of the number of electoral groups, and by reducing the size of each electoral group, to reinforce prospects for rotational equity and, therefore, the legitimacy of the system.

The purpose should not be to set up new groups with avowedly political purpose that would substitute for allegiances already established through other groups (fashioned on a basis of geography, of interest or of sheer capacity) which operate inside or outside the UN multilateral system. The G77, the Non-Aligned Movement, the European Union, the G8 group of industrialized states, the G15 group of developing countries, the Cairns Group, the Australia Group, the New Agenda Coalition, and so on and so forth would, continue, of course, to operate and command the support of those involved in each case. The central purpose of the new electoral grouping would be improvement of essential legitimacy in the UN system.

A Model for Change

The basis of geographical coherence is the foundation of the present arrangements within the New York-based electoral groups. That foundation should be retained, but improved. Smaller electoral groups might enhance a sense of homogeneity amongst members, although that should not be exaggerated and is not the purpose of reconfiguration. Essential realities of power will endure. But control based solely, or largely, on a hierarchy of power should be moderated or, at least, lend an essential legitimacy through

the purpose of differently configured electoral groupings. The strategic purpose of consolidating UN legitimacy is, of course, to enhance multilateral diplomacy and thereby the lateral skills of persuasion and negotiation.

In the model proposed by this contribution, one guiding principle has been that the electoral groups should desirably all be more or less the same size in membership. Thus, in the composition and configuration suggested below, it is proposed that the UN membership be divided among nine electoral groups of plus or minus twenty countries each. There is nothing magical or incontrovertible about the figure nine. Eight groups with slightly more members, or seven with even more, or, alternatively, ten with fewer could equally be considered as the basis for proceeding. Likewise the nomenclature employed to describe the groups (for example Eurasia, Mediterranean-Gulf, North Europe, South Europe, etc.) is illustrative, not definitive. Better geographical descriptions are, almost certainly, possible, and positioning of individual countries inside various groups could be improved. This proposition is a first cut, intended to provoke ideas and improvements to the basic suggested model. (The proposed electoral groupings are shown in the table.)

It is important to underline that the suggested group breakdown is not particularly novel, nor revolutionary. There is precedent. To serve the aim of ensuring equitable geographical representation in the composition of the UN staff complement, the UN Secretariat itself employs a geographical grouping formula of Member States. It divides UN members into seven groups – Africa, Asia and Pacific, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Latin America, Middle East, and North America and the Caribbean. The size of each group ranges disparately from 53 (Africa) down to 14 (North America and Caribbean), and in this one regard is different from the idea for an electoral group formula advanced here. But the essential purpose, which is to reinforce equity, and therefore legitimacy, is not too different. The equitable staffing formula is validated by relevant UN General Assembly resolutions.[13]

Group reconfiguration is not an end itself. It is necessary to demonstrate how it could contribute to consolidating legitimacy through greater equity in the UN.

Potentiality of the Model: UN Security Council

One particular potentiality for the proposed model of reconfiguration here lies, it is suggested, in the contribution it could make to moving ahead on the profoundly complex issue of the reform of the composition of the Security Council. Reality suggests that progress on that issue is never likely to be swift if it continues to involve a difficult full-frontal process of proposing, debating, negotiating and selecting which countries deserve permanent status,[14] and how many new non-permanent places should be created.

Initially, a more oblique approach involving reconfiguring the electoral groups as suggested could impart momentum to the whole business of giving

Table: Proposed Electoral Groupings

1 EURASIA (21)

Afghanistan	India	Russia*
Armenia	Iran	Seychelles
Azerbaijan	Kazakhstan	Sri Lanka
Bangladesh	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan
Belarus	Maldives	Turkmenistan
Bhutan	Nepal	Ukraine
Georgia	Pakistan	Uzbekistan

2 ASIA-PACIFIC (25)

Australia	Lao PDR	RMI
Brunei	Malaysia	ROK
Cambodia	Mongolia	Samoa
China*	Myanmar	Singapore
DPRK	New Zealand	Solomon Is
Fiji	Philippines	Thailand
FSM	Palau	Vanuatu
Indonesia	PNG	Viet Nam
Japan		

3 MEDITERRANEAN-GULF (19)

Algeria	Lebanon	Sudan
Bahrain	Libya	Syria
Egypt	Morocco	Tunisia
Iraq	Oman	Turkey
Israel	Qatar	UAE
Jordan	Saudi Arabia	Yemen
Kuwait		

4 NORTH EUROPE (19)

Belgium	Netherlands	
Czech Rep	Norway	
Denmark	Poland	
Estoniak	Slovak Rep	
Finland	Sweden	
Germany	UK*	
Hungary		
Iceland		
Ireland		
Latvia		
Liechtenstein		
Lithuania		
Luxembourg		

5 SOUTH EUROPE (20)

Albania	Monaco	
Andorra	Portugal	
Austria	Romania	
Bosnia-Herz	San Marino	
Bulgaria	Slovenia	
Croatia	Spain	
Cyprus		
France*		
FRY		
Greece		
Italy		
Macedonia		
Malta		
Moldova		

6 NORTH AFRICA (23)

Benin	Eritrea	Mauritania
Burkina Faso	Ethiopia	Niger
Cameroon	Gamiba	Nigeria
Cape Verde	Ghana	Sao Tome/Prin.
CAR	Guinea	Senegal
Chad	Guinea Bissau	Sierra Leone
Cote d'Ivoire	Liberia	Togo
Eq. Guinea	Mali	

7 SOUTHERN AFRICA (23)

Angola	Lesotho	South Africa
Botswana	Madagascar	Swaziland
Burundi	Malawi	Tanzania
Comoros	Mauritius	Uganda
Congo	Mozambique	Zaire
Djibouti	Namibia	Zambia
Gabon	Rwanda	Zimbabwe
Kenya	Somalia	

8 AMERICAS (19)

Argentina	Ecuador	Panama
Bolivia	El Salvador	Paraguay
Brazil	Guatemala	Peru
Canada	Honduras	Uruguay
Chile	Mexico	USA*
Colombia	Nicaragua	Venezuela
Costa Rica		

9 CARIBBEAN (16)

Antigua/Barb	Dominican Rep	St Kitts/Nevis
Bahamas	Grenada	St Lucia
Barbados	Guyana	St Vincent/Gren
Belize	Haiti	Suriname
Cuba	Jamaica	Trinidad/Tobago
Dominica		

* Permanent Security Council member

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the UN Security Council an eventual structure relevant to the world as it exists. It would constitute a first constructive step.

The contribution of the reconfigured electoral system, on the basis of the nine groups suggested here, would rest on the following foundations:

- The five permanent seats would remain as at present;
- A decision to allocate two non-permanent seats to each of the nine groups except the smallest group (the Caribbean), which would receive one seat: the number of non-permanent seats would therefore be $9\times2-1=17$ which would give a Security Council of 22 seats in total; the UN Charter would require amendment accordingly;
- Each of the nine groups would be extended unique discretion, however, to decide the length of tenure on the Security Council for each successful non-permanent candidate from amongst its number; that provision would require a (simple) Charter amendment that permitted a non-permanent member to succeed itself;
- When declaring their candidature, each prospective candidate would declare to their Group with a two seat entitlement the length of tenure that it sought; the Group could decide to agree to the request as presented or to a different length of tenure for different candidates, taking into account considerations of equity, etc. As an example, the group could agree to extend a longer tenure to one of its candidates (8–10 years) and shorter tenure to the other (1–2 years); the prospect for some degree of semi-permanent status would be opened in this way;
- The power of veto would not be extended, but the prospective semi-permanent presence of powerful non-veto wielding states (particularly if they are large UN financial contributors) would clearly influence the incidence of the veto in the Council;
- The group candidates would still require General Assembly endorsement by a two-thirds majority; but the practice of a contested slate of candidates should have been obviated.

The overall consequence of such change would be to underpin the Security Council with a sturdier, more pluralist foundation. The extra power extended to the electoral groups to decide length of tenure would nurture, but not demand, some greater accountability by successful Council members to the group. It would also enlarge non-permanent member experience of the UN Security Council and its workings, which is a central requirement for a more effective and representative Security Council.

Reconfiguration of electoral groups in the ways suggested here would not be the last word in itself on Council reform. The formalization of a new and larger Council, with an expanded team of permanent members, would still one day require eventual decision. But as a means to circumvent the present stalemate, the ideas here would take things forward, over an interim period at least, in a constructive achievable direction.

Conclusion

The ideas in this contribution are intended to promote debate. The thrust behind the proposals of this paper are, however, fashioned precisely to produce a win-win outcome, in the sense that all countries should be advantaged under such a proposed scheme. Put in another way, no opportunity for any country, or group of countries, is promoted under the proposed formula at the expense of another country, or group of countries.

As suggested, variants of the formula proposed are envisageable. The essential requirement is that the political decision to investigate the scope, and outline, of electoral group reconfiguration be taken by the UN General Assembly; and that practical work be then promptly organized to produce recommendations for Member State decision. The ideas may have some particular relevance to the consideration (by the open-ended group) of UN Security Council reform.

Notes

1 As of August 1999, group membership for electoral purposes was Africa 53, Asia 48, Latin America/Caribbean 33, Western Europe and Others 27, and Eastern Europe 21. Three countries are not assigned within any group – Israel, Palau and Estonia. In late 1999, three new members were scheduled to join the UN – Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga.
2 For a graph of the expansion in UN members, see Karen Mingst and Margaret Karns, eds., *The UN in the Post-Cold War Era* (Boulder: Westview 1995), Figure 2.3, p. 31.
3 P. F. Cowhey in John Ruggie, ed., *Multilateralism Matters* (New York: Columbia University Press 1995), p. 169.
4 Terence O'Brien, *The United Nations: Legacy and Reform* (Wellington: Centre for Strategic Studies, Working Paper No. 6/97, 1997), p. 15.
5 Mingst and Karns, *The UN in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 53.
6 *For a Strong and Democratic UN: South Perspective on UN Reform* (Geneva: South Centre, 1996), p. 29.
7 Miles Kahler, "Multilateralism with Small and Large Numbers," in Ruggie, *Multilateralism Matters*, p. 317.
8 M. Brown, S. Lynn-Jones and S. Miller, eds., *Debating the Democratic Peace* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1996).
9 Ruggie, *Multilateralism Matters*, p. 22.
10 Kahler, "Multilateralism," pp. 307–16.
11 Mingst and Karns, *The UN in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 48.
12 Kahler , "Multilateralism," p. 297.
13 For example, UNGA 45/239 and 51/226.
14 O'Brien, *The United Nations*, p. 17.

EQUITABLE GEOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Hasmy Agam, Permanent Representative of Malaysia

Previous speakers have examined the factors and intentions that led to the development of the current electoral groups, and also what has happened to the geo-political structure and the United Nations itself. This presentation will provide the basis for discussion on the future of the system and possible approaches that could be pursued. No specific proposals on a new system will be made in this paper. It will only inquire as to whether or not there is a need for change, whether the time has come for change and, if so, the nature and substance of the change as well as the manner in which the process could be pursued.

The Need for Change

It has been argued for some time that the current electoral groups system of the United Nations is outmoded, or "creaky" at best, and needs to be reformed. Indeed, the point has also been made that the reform of the system is timely and would serve as an important contribution to the ongoing efforts at overhauling and modernizing the United Nations. It should be part and parcel of, and complementary to, the overall UN reform exercise, including the reform of the Security Council. If reform is indeed necessary, what manner of reform and restructuring of the system would be most acceptable to the Member States? Would a simple "repair" or "remodelling" job suffice, or should it be completely overhauled or even rebuilt in its entirety? Would such a reform be universal in character, involving all of the existing electoral groups, without exeption? To some extent, the answers to these questions would depend on an evaluation for a change of the system, but a pertinent question that could be asked is whether tinkering at the edges will fix the problem.

A useful starting point of this discussion might be to reflect briefly on our understanding of the terms "equitable," "geographical" and "representation" that describe the concepts or notions of participation by Member States in the management of the UN system.

Clearly, the term "equitable" is an evaluative one, meaning different things to different people. It could be argued that what the founders of the United Nations had in mind was the notion of fair or reasonable opportunity for UN Member States to participate in managing the UN system, not necessarily equal opportunity for all states. This may be so, but for most Member States that vie for positions in the UN system, equitable simply means the right and opportunity to participate directly in the decision-making process of the United Nations through election to the various organs and bodies of the UN. Therefore, a system that denies Member States a chance to occupy those coveted positions would naturally be regarded as being unfair and inequitable.

With very few exceptions, such as the African Group, which practices a fair and equitable rotational system, all other regional groups do not offer their members as fair and equitable an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process of the UN. While, occasionally, the rotation principle may be observed by some regional groups, it is not always the case, especially in respect of elections to the most coveted positions, such as the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Competition for these is very intense, and the two bodies are for the most part dominated by the larger and more influential members. This state of affairs has been a matter of increasing concern and unhappiness on the part of the smaller and less influential members of the electoral groups, with the exception of the African Group (which, perhaps, may not require any fundamental electoral reform). In the Asian Group, for instance, although there are clear guide-lines for equitable representation, the legitimate aspirations of the smaller Member States have not been adequately met.

The principle of equitable representation is, of course, intrinsically linked to the important principle of the sovereign equality of states, as enshrined in Article 2 of the United Nations Charter, which is the basis of the membership of the Organization. Although, arguably, this principle has more to do with the rights and obligations of Member States and not necessarily their ability to contribute, it nevertheless exists as a major driving force in the quest for positions in the UN system. It is sometimes ironic to see Member States mounting a frenetic campaign for a position in a particular organ or commit-tee of the UN only to observe an unequal zeal in their performance, once elected – sometimes due to a lack of resources or expertise. Perhaps this has as much to do with the quest for national prestige or the prestige of the Permanent Mission in question as with the pursuit of the principle of sovereign equality of states. Whatever the case may be, the principle of the sovereign equality of states is and will remain sacrosanct to all Member States of the United Nations, big or small, powerful or weak.

It has been pointed out that Article 23 of the Charter actually talks about "geographical distribution" (not representation), and in any case gives prior-ity to consideration of the contribution Member States are able to make to the United Nations. In other words, the proposition could be made that in expanding the notion of equity in the UN context, both for the present and

foreseeable future, greater attention should be given not only to the rights and benefits derived by Member States, but also to their responsibilities and commitments. Although there is intrinsic logic and validity in this line of argument, it is unlikely to be persuasive to most Member States when it comes to the question of the need for fair and equitable representation in the UN system. In most cases, Member States will not be content to have their interests merely represented by others, however influential, responsible, effective or committed these latter countries are.

The issue of geography invariably crops up in any discussion on the principle of equitable distribution or representation. On the other hand, the point has sometimes been made that geography may no longer be a relevant consideration and is simply a convenient way of organizing the world for electoral purposes. It has also been argued that there are better ways of reflecting and ensuring shared interests among Member States than continuing to define their interests in terms of geographical location. Indeed, it could just as well be argued that since the original reference to geography was a reaction to a preoccupation with security perceptions of the immediate post-World War II period, it may not be entirely relevant now in electoral processes that embrace much wider issues than security.

Since national interest and national security are now much more broadly defined, perhaps a case could be made for a reconsideration of the regional composition of the electoral groups, based less on geographical factors and more on other relevant factors such as commonality of political or economic interests and other affinities. One suspects, however, that the case to be made on this score cannot be a very compelling one, given the strong "pull" of geography for most Member States. Consequently, any realistic readjustment of the electoral groups system will have to be made on the basis of a more rational redrawing of the current geographical divisions of the Member States of the Organization rather than ignoring entirely the imperatives of geography.

It is also pertinent to note the debate during the early decades following the establishment of the United Nations on whether the distribution of seats was meant to reflect geographical *representation* or *distribution*. Although Article 23 of the Charter clearly talks of equitable geographical *distribution*, in terms of apportioning non-permanent seats on the Security Council, obviously the debate is far from over. Clearly, there is a substantive difference between the two, and this should be explored in the context of the current debate on the overall reform of the United Nations, in order to make the Organization more relevant to the demands of the new century, if not the new millennium. Perhaps, in the context of this debate, it can be argued that representation on UN bodies is not (or should not be) the only measure of involvement in and contribution to the system, although it remains the most obvious, direct and substantive, and certainly most appealing to Member States.

It can hardly be denied, of course, that occupying a seat on a UN body is much sought after for a number of compelling reasons. Aside from the

obvious high political profile and prestige accruing from it, there are other valid considerations such as, *inter alia*, the need to gain invaluable experience and acquire or develop expertise in particular aspects of multilateral diplomacy and to provide pertinent inputs and perspectives to the process of UN debate, so as to ensure a more balanced approach by the United Nations in its handling of global issues. This is particularly so in respect of issues of "special interest" to Member States either as donors or as recipients of UN aid.

In trying to understand the motivations behind the annual scramble and jockeying for elective positions, a fair question to ask is whether it signifies that the system has not worked well for Member States, or if it is more a reflection of the quest for national prestige than the desire for actual benefits of representation. On the other hand, could we expect that less significance would be attached to elections if it was felt that the system had worked well for all participants? Perhaps both impulses are at work, in that it is both a reflection of dissatisfaction with the current electoral groups system and, hence, a desire for more direct national involvement in the decision-making process of the UN, as well as the natural quest for prestige and influence.

While part of the solution might be to improve the way the system works so that Member States can have more confidence that their views will be properly recognized and reflected in final outcomes, it is unclear whether an improved electoral system would necessarily translate into a lessening of interest in elections on the part of Member States; probably not. What is clear is that there is a need to initiate discussion on this not-unimportant aspect of the reform agenda which, for some reasons, Member States have not properly acknowledged, despite their expressed concerns about the inadequacy of the system. Such a dialogue process is timely in the context of the ongoing efforts to make the United Nations more relevant and responsive to the demands and challenges of our time. The early initiation of this dialogue among Member States is likely to generate many useful and constructive ideas and proposals as to whether or not, and how best, the reform of the electoral groups system could be advanced.

Process and Methodology

To ensure a successful outcome of the process in which the reform of the regional voting groups is going to take place, it is important to prepare it well. In this regard it is, perhaps, useful to draw lessons from the efforts to reform and restructure the Security Council, so as to avoid the pitfalls that have bogged down that process. Malaysia's own experience, during its presidency of the 51st session of the General Assembly, in respect of the reform and restructuring exercise of the Security Council, may be of some relevance in the consideration of the subject at hand.

The first obvious lesson to be drawn from that experience is that it is important, first of all, to gauge the general mood of the membership of the

UN in terms of its desire for change and its preparedness to engage in another protracted process of debate and negotiation, especially given the current scepticism, even cynicism, about the ongoing discussion on the reform and restructuring of the Security Council. Is the general membership of the United Nations ready for another round of possibly equally sterile debate on yet another aspect of UN reform?

Secondly, if we are to embark on such a process, assuming there is general support for it, it is important to engage in broad-based consultations for the purpose of canvassing ideas and proposals, not only on the substantive aspects of the reform of the regional voting groups, but also on the approaches and modalities of such a reform process.

Thirdly, once the process of consultation is under way, it is important to adopt a constituency- or consensus-building approach and methodology, without alienating any Member State or groups of states, so as to ensure a continuing and sustaining climate of political support and prevent or neutralize any possible opposition. For this purpose, it is important to discourage the formation of rival groups, other than those formally established in open-ended fashion, in order to prevent polarization among Member States that will be detrimental to the overall goal of consensus building. It is important to ensure that the reform process is not perceived as a threat to the interests of any one Member State or groups of states. Particular attention should be given to identifying those states that might be especially sensitive about any reform of the electoral groups system. Appropriate steps will need to be taken to assuage their concerns and secure their support for the process on the argument that the reform is in the interest of *all* Member States.

Fourthly, it is important to avoid the pitfall of focusing too early on possible outcomes and to concentrate, instead, on putting up general outlines or framework, based on the emerging consensus of ideas that have gone through an intensive process of consultation among Member States, incorporating shared common denominators, leaving the final outcome to be arrived at during the negotiating process. The outlines or framework should be as generalized and as flexible as possible, to allow for additions or modifications by Member States as the process proceeds. The introduction of a pre-prepared blueprint, however brilliant, should be avoided at all cost.

Clearly, the entire electoral reform exercise, if it is to be pursued, requires careful planning and strategizing with a view to generating support as well as allaying fears and suspicions on the part of some Member States which might consider any reform of the existing regional groups arrangement as being unfavourable, or even inimical, to their interests. While it may be naive to expect that a "perfect" approach or solution is possible, and that a consensus is more likely to be found on the basis of a rough equivalence of discomfort or disappointment, it is nevertheless important that, at least at the initial stages, every effort must be made to adopt a broad-based, consensual approach. It should avoid being confrontational and aim, instead, at securing the confidence and support all Member States. The final package of reforms,

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which should only be presented following intensive consultations, should not be too radical or revolutionary in character, but one that is sufficiently forward-looking, that could contribute towards making the United Nations electoral groups system more effective and that reflects the current geopolitical realities, based on a more rational reordering or realignment of the grouping of Member States.

At the macro level, it will help if a way can be found to develop a shared view among Member States that, on balance, reform can deliver benefits all around. Perhaps a useful approach in evolving that shared view might involve a reconsideration (or redefinition) of the "national interest" of Member States. Perhaps it may be possible to persuade Member States that a marginal loss in electoral opportunities might be offset by a more balanced system that has stronger support from the membership as a whole, and that also provides more certainty (e.g., through balanced rotational arrangements, or understandings that recognize the particular circumstances and ability to contribute). In other words, there should be an appeal to eschew traditional notions of national prestige or pride in seeking election to a UN organ, in favour of a more enlightened approach of strengthening group interests and cohesion. This undoubtedly will be a delicate undertaking, but one which is worth trying in the interest of injecting a new dynamism to the system.

In considering the above, however, Member States will have to deal with a number of other pertinent questions, such as the question of current unequal distribution of "electoral assets" as well as the role of the groups in the context of new global realities. It is necessary to examine the nature of these assets and the issue of their distribution both within and between regional groups themselves. It is equally important to analyze the likely or expected role of the electoral groups in the context of the rapidly changing global situation, characterized sometimes by changing needs and shifting loyalties. Although, in the best of scenarios, it is highly unlikely that there could ever be policy coordination within these groups (there are other mechanisms and structures for that) – with the exception, perhaps, of the more homogeneous of them – there may, nevertheless, be scope for the groups to evolve increased interaction among their members in the area of information sharing and consultation. This, in itself, would be a major contribution to consensus building within the larger and increasingly more complex UN system.

Before embarking on this reform exercise, there is a need to have a better understanding of the diversity of views on these issues, as the debate is only just beginning. Perhaps a useful approach in that direction might be to ask the Secretary-General to canvass the views of Member States through the initiation of a simple resolution in the General Assembly, in the same manner that the process of the reform and restructuring of the Security Council had been initiated.

In the meantime, and as preparation for the initiative in the General Assembly, interested Member States could informally meet and develop ideas

in terms of the general substance and approaches of such a reform exercise that would provide the necessary conceptual framework of discussion, paying particular attention to ensure the representativeness and inclusiveness of any informal group that may be formed to promote the idea.