

## THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF UN ELECTORAL GROUPS

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*Who controls the past controls the future.*<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup>

UN General Assembly (UNGA) electoral groups (also referred to as groupings) 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.<sup>5</sup> 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."<sup>6</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.”<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup>

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."<sup>13</sup> The following year the US proposed an identical distribution, but named the last two categories "Near East and Africa" and "Eastern Europe."<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup>

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."<sup>16</sup>

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.<sup>17</sup>

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.”<sup>18</sup>

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.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup>

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.

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.<sup>23</sup>

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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

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.

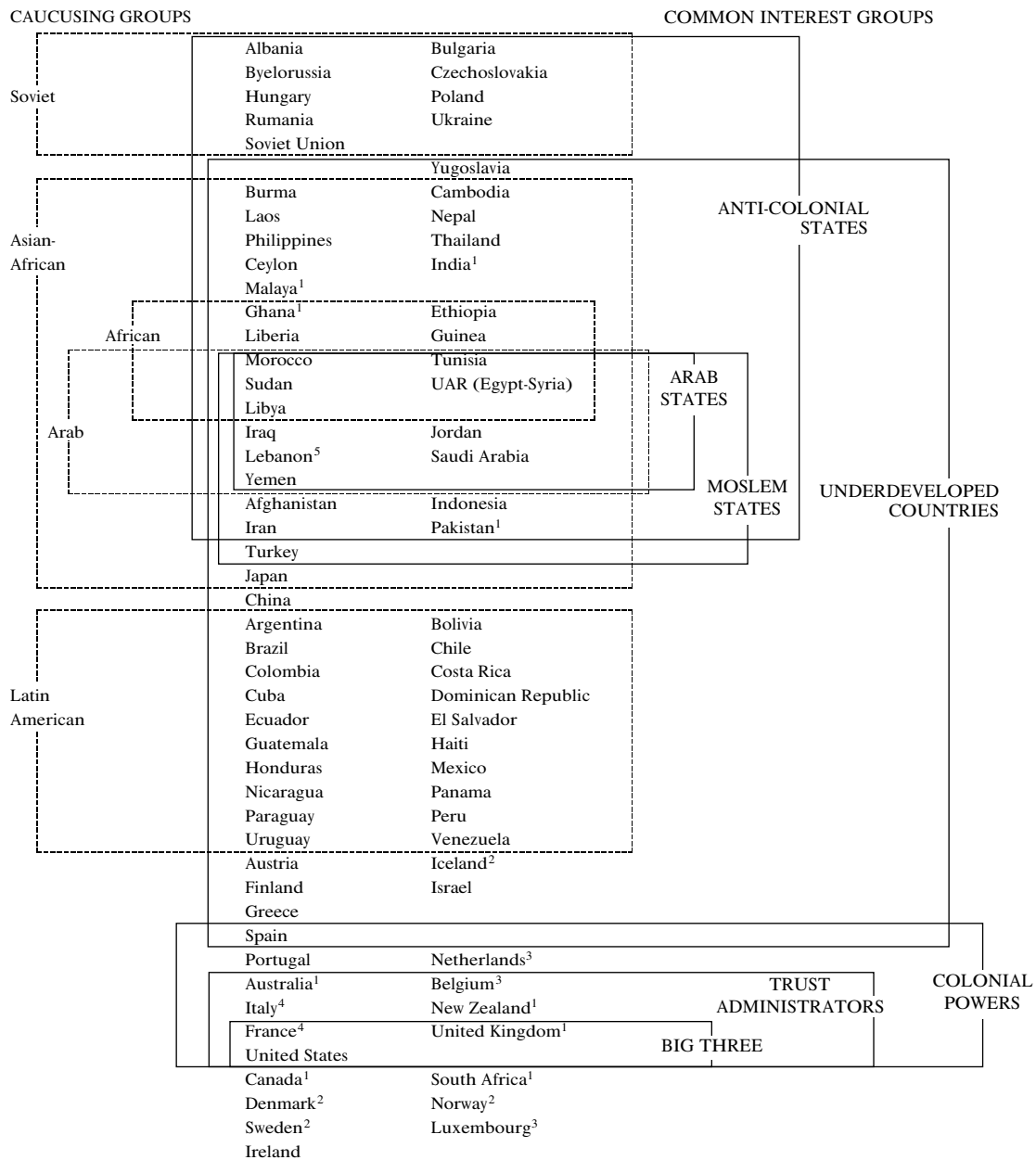
In the case of Eastern Europe, the voting of the caucusing bloc was largely led and dictated by the Soviet Union. The nucleus of the bloc was formed when Byelorussia and the Ukraine were admitted as founding members of the UN in addition to the Soviet Union. Yugoslavia and Poland were initially part 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.<sup>26</sup>

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



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.<sup>27</sup>

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.<sup>28</sup> 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.”<sup>29</sup>

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.”<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup>

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."<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup>

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.<sup>34</sup> 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*<sup>35</sup> 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

<i>Eastern Europe (21)</i>			
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	
<i>Western Europe and other States (27)</i>			
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	
<i>Latin America and Caribbean (33)</i>			
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
<i>Asia (48)</i>			
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 Republic of Korea	Lebanon	Republic of Korea	Viet Nam
Fiji	Malaysia	Samoa	Yemen
India	Maldives	Saudi Arabia	
Indonesia	Marshall Islands	Singapore	
	Micronesia	Solomon Islands	
<i>Africa (53)</i>			
Algeria	Egypt	Malawi	Somalia
Angola	Equatorial 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	
Djibouti	Madagascar	Sierra Leone	
<i>States not currently members of a UN regional group (3)</i>			
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.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

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

<i>Group</i>	<i>Percentage of UN Membership</i>		
	<i>1945</i>	<i>1967</i>	<i>1999</i>
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.

## *Evaluating Reform Proposals*

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.<sup>38</sup>

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 géographique 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, p.1. 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.