

## A PERSPECTIVE ON THE PSYCHOLOGY OF INTRA-GROUP POLITICS AT THE UNITED NATIONS: THE AFRICAN GROUP

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*The focus of this article is on highlighting noticeable trends in the African Group and its position on the ongoing one-and-a-half decade long negotiation on reform of the United Nations (UN) Security Council. These reform negotiations have proved to be one of the most complex and contentious of issues, generating a seemingly intractable series of negotiations seeking its resolution.*

*The study of the African Group's quest for substantive political inclusion in the Security Council has been revealing of the kinds of intra-group dynamics at the UN. Multiple roles (i.e. "drivers", "conductors", "defenders", "breakers" and "cruisers") are assumed by individual countries in a group during the negotiations process.*

*Overall, the conclusions derived supports assert that it is a misconception to think of negotiating blocs at the UN as strictly unified or unanimous voting or negotiating groups. This is because, in reality, while these coalitions discuss issues together based on areas of mutual interest, they do not necessarily reach full agreement on all aspects of issues but may be able to attain consensus on a common bargaining position in order not to lose that clout as a group to competing blocs.*

### Introduction

Since 1993 the United Nations (UN) General Assembly has convened meetings to deliberate on how to proceed with the issue of reforming the UN Security Council, an issue which has engaged its attention to date without any success. The major obstacle has been that of competing interests on the matter, with the key challenges being proffered by different political groupings or coalitions at

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the UN. However, the dynamics within negotiating Groups which in turn affect the outcomes of deliberations at the UN does not appear to have had much psychodynamic analyses over the years. On the other hand, the psychodynamics of UN inter-group politics have been found to be immediately engaging. This is in view of the fact that there exists a natural movement to form coalitions as individual UN members states pursuing their national interests want to bring as many other nations into their fold based largely on shared interests. Nevertheless, the internal group dynamics behind stated common positions articulated by such blocs actually determine the success, the longevity and final outcome of UN negotiations. It is on this latter element of intra-group relations that this paper seeks, in an applied way, to identify insights and broaden psychodynamics understanding on the nature of such underlying influences to associations made to collective positions of negotiating blocs at the UN.

The focus will be on highlighting noticeable trends in the African Group and its position on the ongoing one-and-a-half decade long negotiation on reform of the UN Security Council, as a case study and staging point for the central thesis. The internal dynamics of Africa's position on the reform of the Council, with particular reference to the 2005 period (when a world summit was held at the UN) emerging as a catalytic period in crystallizing the common African position. That period also exposed the underlying differences within the group which have, consequently, since left the bloc's overarching (i.e. common) negotiating position unchanged.

### **The United Nations "Group" System**

The system of bloc politics in the UN is one in which nations have, as a matter of necessity, organized themselves into groups based on areas of mutual interest<sup>1</sup>. These blocs comprise nations with similar political, historical, or cultural backgrounds, and are often formed on a geo-political basis. Since the inception of the UN in 1945, blocs have played a part in UN politics, especially negotiations. Such UN blocs have the main objective of achieving consensus within their ranks to enable them to act cohesively as a negotiating unit. The effectiveness of any given group in pressing through its position is usually dependent on its ability to attain consensus within its membership. This determines the effectiveness of any given bloc in asserting its position for possible adoption by the wider membership of the UN. The driving force to the formation of blocs lies in the "one-nation-one-vote" system, where nations of varying sizes, populations, and ideologies are afforded the representative power of one vote<sup>2</sup>. However, agreement within a group on a common position with which to engage other contending blocs does not imply automatic unanimity among its members.

A major consideration is that various countries within a grouping may have divergent priorities emanating from their respective national interests. Group considerations may, therefore, sometimes be bypassed by certain countries or

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<sup>1</sup> Houston Area Model United Nations (HAMUN XXV) Delegate Handbook (Houston: The Houston Chronicle Printing Services 1999), p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 35.