

Report Part Title: Methods of Diplomacy

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ence can have advantages, many ambassadors in the latter scenario would prefer additional capacity and substantive support from their national governments.

INVESTMENT IN THEIR REPRESENTATIVES

The extensive bilateral diplomacy carried out by small states in New York underlines the need for leaders of small-state missions to be effective, respected, and engaged diplomats. As a result, small-state representatives tend to be highly qualified and well regarded domestically and internationally. These ambassadors can ensure, “through the sheer force of their abilities,” that their states are noticed and listened to at the UN.¹⁹ The centrality of the UN in small-state foreign policy endows missions in New York with incredible value, but can also raise serious capacity challenges. A single small-state ambassador may be accredited to as many as five nations while serving at the UN in New York, and expected to interact bilaterally with as many countries as possible.²⁰

In some cases, small-state ambassadors may have longer terms than their large-state counterparts. Longer terms in New York can help ambassadors develop networks and connections leading to a greater voice and impact. Yet when these ambassadors leave their UN posts, the small mission faces a serious loss of institutional knowledge. Strategic planning for the mission in New York, coordinated by the foreign ministry, is one possible way to overcome the disproportionate vulnerability of small-state missions to the impact of staff turnover. In one instance, a small state’s foreign ministry authored a fifteen-year strategic plan that each successive permanent representative undertook to implement. This ensured continuity in policies and priorities, and aimed to build the expertise and profile of the mission through campaigning for and serving on various UN bodies.

PRIORITIZATION AND NICHE DIPLOMACY

Given the breadth of the UN agenda and the resources required to cover even core UN meetings, prioritization is also key for small states. Prioritization was raised repeatedly as an essential process for enabling small states to have an effective role at the UN. Small states do best when they choose a limited scope of issues, and invest resources and personnel accordingly.

Prioritization is not only advantageous for individual states and missions, it also facilitates “small-small cooperation” or cooperation among small states. As small states develop experience, networks, and expertise in priority areas, they gain access to insider information that can be shared with fellow small states. As one permanent representative explained, “Small states’ best approach is choosing a niche, taking relevant posts like committee and convention chair positions, and becoming a recognized insider.”²¹ In addition to providing small states with the best return from their limited resources, prioritization can enable them to develop expertise that is ultimately sought out by states of all sizes, thus further enhancing their profile and influence. In developing these areas of niche diplomacy, small states can in turn offer each other insider access and elusive information, such as dynamics in the Security Council. Many small-state ambassadors agreed, “When a small state is elected to the Security Council, this helps other small states gain information about what is happening.”²²

In the literature on small states, the importance of prioritization is widely documented. It has been termed “niche specialization,”²³ wherein states cultivate an area of expertise; “norm entrepreneurship,”²⁴ wherein states champion a certain issue or area in the multilateral arena; or “magnetic attraction,” wherein small states engage the world community on an appealing or relevant topic.²⁵

19 Hong, “Small States in the United Nations,” p. 283.

20 Some small-state permanent representatives to the UN are accredited to multiple posts. For instance, one Pacific Island ambassador concurrently serves as ambassador to the UN, the United States, Cuba, Venezuela, and Israel.

21 Interview with small-state ambassador, New York, January 31, 2013.

22 Interview with small-state ambassador, New York, February 5, 2013.

23 Rana, *21st Century Diplomacy*.

24 Thorhallsson, “Small States in the UN Security Council.”

25 Rana, *21st Century Diplomacy*, p. 68.

Box 1. Niche Diplomacy: Small States Bring Big Ideas to the UN

In an address to the FOSS in 2012, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon asserted, “Being small does not mean an absence of big ideas.”²⁶ Indeed, there are many examples of small states, often less constrained by political alliances and direct national interests, championing ideas that have led to major international agreements:

- The Arms Trade Treaty, adopted by the General Assembly in April 2013, grew out of a concept and early documents introduced and coordinated by Costa Rica, a state that went on to contribute to the intergovernmental process that produced a treaty following more than a decade of intense advocacy and negotiation.
- In 2009, the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) drafted a resolution calling for the security implications of climate change to be acknowledged and addressed. Their resolution passed the General Assembly by consensus and enjoyed co-sponsorship from more than 100 states.
- The long-neglected idea for the establishment of an International Criminal Court was revived by a speech to the UN General Assembly by the prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago in 1989, leading to the adoption of the Rome Statute and the creation of the court less than a decade later.
- The process of negotiating the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which came into force in 1994 and has now been ratified by 165 states, was driven throughout by small maritime states, with countries such as Malta, Singapore, Fiji, and New Zealand playing significant roles.

REGIONAL TIES COME FIRST

Despite the importance of small-small cooperation, several ambassadors emphasized the precedence of regional and subregional ties in their approach to UN diplomacy. In their view, countries from the same region have “the same problems, the same

vulnerabilities.”²⁷ Within a region, the long-term cooperation of countries often translates to similar approaches to diplomacy.

Some ambassadors said that outside of regional groups, they encounter different cultures of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy—particularly with regard to information sharing and substantive cooperation. In explaining this reality, one representative asserted, “The regional approach has to come before the international approach. Small-state international cooperation has to begin at the point where regional cooperation ends.”²⁸

The natural limits to substantive cooperation between small states, given the diversity of their priorities and interests, confirms the precedence of alliances based on factors other than size alone. Still, ambassadors pointed to a number of substantive areas in which greater cooperation among small states could be successful, including transparent and accountable working methods in UN bodies, the post-2015 development framework, and transboundary challenges such as climate change and responses to natural disasters.

BROAD COOPERATION

Several small-state permanent representatives outlined common approaches to cooperation and information sharing at the UN. In working with other states, it appears that many small states work through a number of collaborative relationships simultaneously. These partnerships include the following alliances and groupings: (1) states selected according to national interest; (2) neighboring states; (3) an official or unofficial regional group or caucus; (4) a regional governing body, such as the European Union; (5) strategic security partners such as NATO; (6) informal groups on substantive issues, such as the Friends of Mediation or the Friends of Resolution 1325; and (7) the FOSS.

As noted above, small-state representatives sometimes share information and cooperate based on substantive or thematic alliances, rather than a regional approach. Their cooperation does not center on size or partnerships with other small states but instead on common ground regarding

26 Ban Ki-moon, speech delivered at the twentieth anniversary conference of the Forum of Small States, New York, October 1, 2012, available at www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sgsm14558.doc.htm.

27 Interview with small-state ambassador, New York, May 21, 2013.

28 Ibid.

certain issues. There was consensus among small-state officials that groups and alliances are only effective when all members can reach common agreement. To that end, like-mindedness and shared interests trump size when it comes to forging partnerships and lobbying alliances. An additional factor mentioned by many small states is the development of networks based on personal connections and relationships.

Mechanisms and Groups

Groups play a vital role in facilitating the engagement of small states at the UN. Small groups and small-state oriented alliances may offer the most effective fora for achieving substantive and electoral cooperation, as small-state voices can be stifled in larger groups. But this also raises challenges due to the great diversity of small states. Small-state groupings at the UN without a thematic focus can lack clear common objectives.

Nevertheless, “it is through partnerships...that small states survive and thrive at the UN.”²⁹ Groups enable states to exponentially expand their coverage of the UN agenda. Small states that have employed “variable geometry”—working through multiple groupings and approaching issues with allies—are particularly successful at the UN.

As noted above, 105 small states belong to the Forum of Small States (FOSS), an informal grouping that meets to discuss issues of shared concern.³⁰ The FOSS was established in 1992 under the leadership of the permanent mission of Singapore to the UN. When then permanent representative Chew Tai Soo arrived in New York in 1991, he realized that small states—especially those not aligned with a recognized grouping—were often excluded from negotiations. An initial coalition of small states created the FOSS to redress the problem of under-representation; serve as a forum for small states to support each other in elections; promote shared views; and pressure the international community to adhere to the UN

Charter’s principles. They defined “small” not by physical size or economic status, but by population, in order to create a more inclusive coalition with greater political influence.³¹

Additional small-state groups at the UN are sometimes formed to address particular issues, including Security Council reform. In 2005, Switzerland, Costa Rica, Jordan, Liechtenstein, and Singapore formed the Small Five (S5) group to call for limited Security Council reforms to benefit states too small to expect to obtain a lasting seat on the council in future reform processes. The S5 sought greater transparency through reformed Security Council working methods regarding membership, veto power, and relations between the Security Council and General Assembly.³² More recently, in May 2013, twenty-one member states—including sixteen small states—renewed the call for Security Council reform with the launch of the cross-regional Accountability, Coherence, and Transparency (ACT) group, led by Switzerland.³³ ACT approaches Security Council reform from a pragmatic stance, calling not for the enlargement of the council but instead for better working methods. Another group comprised of small and medium-sized states is the Global Governance Group, or 3G, which was formed in 2010 to address the emergence of new global processes outside the UN, in particular the G20. The 3G’s thirty members seek to promote a more inclusive framework of global governance in the face of exclusive processes.³⁴

Small states often benefit from regional and geographic groups and the coordination and burden-sharing mechanisms offered by group membership. Prominent examples include the European Union and the African Union, both of which offer member states information-sharing and policy briefings, as well as other regional organizations like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The Caribbean Community (CARICOM), established in 1973, and the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS), established in 2007, are examples of regional small-

29 McLay, “Small States at the United Nations.”

30 Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “International Issues: Small States,” available at www.mfa.gov.sg/content/mfa/international_issues/small_states.html.

31 Chew Tai Soo, “A History of the Forum of Small States,” paper prepared for the twentieth anniversary conference of the Forum of Small States, October 1, 2012.

32 The group submitted a draft resolution to the General Assembly in April 2011, which was debated but ultimately did not advance to a vote.

33 The Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) Group, “Better Working Methods for Today’s UN Security Council,” May 2013, available at www.eda.admin.ch/etc/medialib/downloads/edazen/topics/intorg/un/missny/other.Par.0165.File.tmp/ACT%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf.

34 Global Governance Group (3G), “Press Statement by the Global Governance Group (3G),” New York, September 25, 2013, available at www.mfa.gov.sg/content/mfa/overseasmission/newyork/nyemb_statements/global_governance_group/2013/201309/press_20130925.html.