

Conceptualizing Groups in UN Multilateralism: The Diplomatic Practice of Group Politics

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Summary

Political groups permeate the diplomatic process across the United Nations (UN) system, from conference diplomacy to annual sessions of the deliberative bodies, yet they remain poorly understood and under-appreciated. This article approaches groups from a conceptual and theoretical perspective, providing a typology to differentiate clearly the various groups that are active in UN processes, from electoral groups to regional organizations and single-issue coalitions. The article also examines how theories of multilateralism, global governance and international negotiation largely exclude group and inter-group dynamics. Theories of global governance and multilateralism operate at the systemic level of analysis, while theories of negotiation and coalitions reflect assumptions of individual agency; both levels of analysis obscure the operation of political groups and group politics in UN multilateralism. The emerging theories of diplomatic practice provide a meso-level approach that reveals the pervasive practice of group politics and politicized diplomacy in UN multilateralism.

Keywords

United Nations (UN) – diplomacy – informal groups – negotiations – multilateralism – global governance

Introduction

Groups are everywhere in United Nations (UN) negotiations, both in conference diplomacy and in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and other deliberative bodies. At the 2015 Paris meeting of the Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), a 'high ambition coalition' brought together the European Union (EU) and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), which met secretly for six months in advance of the Paris climate talks and managed to push for a binding agreement to limit warming to less than two degrees Celsius.¹ Yet in 2010, many of the same states were at loggerheads over the EU's effort to gain enhanced observer status in the UN General Assembly. The EU's effort to upgrade its observer status after the Lisbon Treaty met stiff resistance on the part of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the African Group, which managed to pass a deferral motion against the EU's resolution.² After a year of intensive diplomatic outreach, the EU prevailed in passing a resolution enhancing the ability of the European Union, now represented by the new EU Delegation rather than EU member states, to be active in the UNGA. Groups are also present in the work of the Security Council, from the Contact Groups that are active in mediation to the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) Group, a cross-regional group of 27 small and mid-sized countries working to improve the working methods of the UN Security Council, particularly focusing on veto-restraint on mass atrocities.³

As these short examples show, not all groups that are politically active in the UN operate in the same way. The EU and its member states are legally obliged to act in concert when there is a common position, while the ACT Group comes together in that configuration only on that particular issue. Sometimes groups can build a broad coalition to foster consensus, while at other times they demarcate divisions. Groups may operate differently in different UN bodies; conference negotiations unfold differently than the annual sessions of the General Assembly. The contributions to this special issue of *The Hague Journal*

1 Karl Mathiesen and Fiona Harvey, 'Climate Coalition Breaks Cover in Paris to Push for Binding and Ambitious Deal', *The Guardian* (8 December 2015); and David Victor, 'Why Paris Worked: A Different Approach to Climate Diplomacy', *Yale Environment* 360, available online at http://e360.yale.edu/feature/why_paris_worked_a_different_approach_to_climate_diplomacy/2940/.

2 See Katie Verlin Laatikainen, 'The EU Delegation in New York: A Debut of High Political Drama', in David Spence and Jozef Batora (eds.), *The European External Action Service: European Diplomacy Post-Westphalia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

3 Center for UN Reform, *FACT Sheet* (June 2015).

of *Diplomacy* provide different cases across the UN landscape where group interactions have shaped political outcomes.

This article approaches groups from a conceptual and theoretical perspective. The first section provides a typology of different kinds of groups that are politically consequential. The second section examines the main conceptual and theoretical approaches to the UN in order to demonstrate how group interactions are largely excluded from analysis. Theories of global governance and multilateralism tend to operate at the systemic level of analysis, while theories of negotiation and coalitions reflect assumptions of agency. Both of these levels of analysis obscure the operation of groups in the UN's multilateral processes. The final section of the article suggests that emerging theories of diplomatic practice provide a meso-level approach that allows the pervasive practice of group diplomacy to be observed and analysed more concretely.

What Are the Groups in UN Multilateralism?

There are broadly three categories of groups in UN political processes: electoral groups that assure equitable geographic distribution in election to limited-membership bodies; regional organizations, which have an existence outside of the UN itself; and explicitly political groups that may or may not be defined in geographic terms. These political groups may include broad, institutionalized, cross-regional political groups such as the Group of 77 or the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, as well as less-institutionalized single-issue groups such as the Alliance of Small Island States or various friends' groups.⁴

In one of the very few studies of informal groups in the UN's negotiating context, Helen Leigh-Phippard notes that these groups — regional or interest-based, standing or ad hoc — coalesce differently across the multilateral landscape: 'The precise configuration of coalitions operating at any given conference will depend on the issues under consideration. And while coalitions are more usually composed of either developed or developing states, they can in some circumstances embrace both'.⁵

4 Teresa Whitfield, *Working with Groups of Friends* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2010).

5 Helen Leigh-Phippard, 'The Influence of Informal Groups in Multilateral Diplomacy', in Jan Melissen (ed.), *Innovation in Diplomatic Practice* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999); and on the role of informal groups in the UN Security Council and the evolving practice of contact groups, see Jochen Prantl, *The Security Council and Informal Groups of States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

TABLE 1 *Typology of groups politically active at the United Nations*

Group Type	Basic Function/ Relation to UN	Examples
<i>Regional Groups (Electoral)</i>	To assure geographic distribution of seats in the limited membership UN bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – African Group – Asia–Pacific Group – Eastern European Group – Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) – Western European and Other Group (WEOG)
<i>Regional/ International Organizations</i>	To cooperate inter-organizationally; ROS have autonomous existence outside of the UN; Relations with UN may be shaped by Chapter VIII of the UN Charter; ROS have varying levels of institutionalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – European Union (EU) – African Union (AU) – Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) – Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) – Union of South American Nations (UNASUR)
<i>Regional and Cross- Regional Political Groups</i>	To pursue collective interests in UN deliberations; Largely function within UN multilateralism; Multiple areas of collective agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Group of 77 and China – The Nordic Group – Non-Aligned Movement – JUSCANZ (Japan, United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand)
<i>Single-Issue Political Groups</i>	Small groups of states from different geographic regions that share a strong common position in negotiations; Often working with non-governmental organizations and experts; Contact groups for mediation efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Friends of R2P (responsibility to protect) – Cairns Group (agriculture) – Alliance of Small Island States (climate change) – New Agenda Coalition (disarmament) – Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) Group (veto restraint)

SOURCE: AUTHOR.

It is important to highlight that these groups are composed of member state delegations for the most part with full standing in diplomatic processes. There has been remarkable growth in the scope of participants in multilateral conferences and in UN negotiations and deliberations: non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international civil society, which is often termed the 'third UN',⁶ are increasingly making the UN's multilateral processes far more public and transparent affairs, alongside the experts and scientists who have long been engaged in UN negotiations and activities.⁷ While these groups are undoubtedly important in multilateral processes, as several contributors to this special issue of *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* suggest, their place at the negotiating tables is far more circumscribed than those of member states with full decision-making prerogatives who channel their deliberations among other like-minded member states.

Regional Electoral Groups

The UN has had a regional orientation in its internal arrangements from the start, although regionalism in the UN's internal processes has been based upon the evolution of 'practices'. The Charter insists upon 'equitable geographic distribution' in the selection of states to limited membership bodies (such as the UN Security Council), without any guidance in how to assure such equitable geographic distribution.⁸ Yet even this principle is not straightforward, and Sam Daws describes how politicized the process of equitable geographic distribution was and remains.⁹ The current arrangement for the five so-called UN regional groups — that is, the African Group, Asia-Pacific Group, Eastern European Group, Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) and the

6 Thomas G. Weiss, Tatiana Carayannis and Richard Jolly, 'The "Third" United Nations', *Global Governance*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2009), pp. 123-142.

7 Marcel Hanegraaff, 'Interest Groups at Transnational Negotiation Conferences: Goals, Strategies, Interactions and Influence', *Global Governance*, vol. 21, no. 4 (October-December 2015), pp. 599-620; Jonas Tallberg *et al.*, *The Opening Up of International Organizations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Emanuel Adler and Peter M. Haas, 'Conclusion: Epistemic Communities, World Order, and the Creation of a Reflective Research Program', *International Organization*, vol. 46, no. 1 (1992), pp. 367-390; and Mai'a K. Davis Cross, 'Rethinking Epistemic Communities Twenty Years Later', *Review of International Studies*, vol. 39, no. 1 (2013), pp. 137-160.

8 Article 23(1) indicates that non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council should be based on the principle of 'equitable geographic distribution'.

9 Sam Daws, 'The Origins and Development of the UN Electoral Groups', in Ramesh C. Thakur (ed.), *What Is Geographic Representation in the Twenty-First Century? Report of the International Peace Academy and United Nations University* (New York: United Nations University Press, 1999).

Western European and Other Group (WEOG) — emerged to elect members to limited-body organs of the UN (see Table 1).¹⁰ The organization and practices of these regional groups are not codified and are managed internally. The African Group has a very transparent and well-functioning system of rotation and presents an agreed-upon list of candidates to the UNGA for approval, while candidatures from GRULAC and WEOG are often contested.¹¹

Although they are institutionalized and of varying efficiency, these electoral regional groups raise important questions about their wider role in the UN.¹² The UN Charter's principle of equitable geographic distribution intends for even the smallest member states to have the opportunity to serve in key roles and offices through a system of regional rotation, but there are variations in electoral group size (for example, the African Group includes 54 members, while the East European Group has 23 members) that do not correspond to relative population size or any objective criterion for regional rotation. Indeed, Ramesh Thakur questions the meaning of region in the case of equitable geographic distribution and representation in the UN:

What is a region? Asia is a geographical construct developed by Europeans to differentiate the European 'self' from the Asian 'other'. [...] While region can be defined with reference to geography, the sense of 'regionalism' is based more on common sentiment. [...] Perhaps the world community needs to address the question of the unit of UN membership. Should regional organizations be given membership in their own right, instead of states, or not at all?¹³

Thakur raises an interesting point that highlights the tension between membership based on national sovereignty and the organization of politics based

10 These five electoral groups were established by UNGA Resolution 1991, paragraph 3, in 1963.

11 UN critic Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick surprisingly praises the effectiveness of the African Group in the electoral process; see Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, 'The United Nations as a Political System: A Practicing Political Scientist's Insights into UN Politics', *World Affairs*, vol. 170, no. 2 (2007), pp. 97-102.

12 Terence O'Brien, 'Electoral Group Reconfiguration and Present Day Realities', in Ramesh C. Thakur (ed.), *What is Geographic Representation in the Twenty-First Century: Report of the International Peace Academy and United Nations University* (New York: United Nations University Press, 1999).

13 Ramesh Thakur, 'Introduction: UN Electoral Groupings Reform', in Thakur (ed.), *What Is Geographic Representation in the Twenty-First Century?*, pp. 3-4.

upon consolidating national interests through groups. While the UN has evolved over the years to incorporate other sorts of actors (although not other kinds of *members*), this question about the proper role for groups and the representation of interests lies at the heart of the debate over EU status in the UN.

These electoral groups based upon geographic distribution serve the function of organizing participation (that is, the distribution of seats in non-universal organs) in the administration of international institutions, but it should not be presumed that regional groups necessarily operate politically in the UN's substantive work.¹⁴ Regional or electoral groups are functionally distinct from the political or caucusing groups (or blocs), about which surprisingly little is known in the scholarly literature. Some electoral groups have been politically active in the diplomatic process (the African Group, for example),¹⁵ while others merely fulfil their electoral function (the Eastern European Group). We are interested in electoral groups insofar as they play an active role in the political processes of UN multilateralism.

Regional Organizations

Regional organizations have an existence outside the UN context, with their own constitutional and legal foundations. The legal basis for the relationship between regional organizations and the United Nations is found in Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, but those provisions are heavily influenced by the need to ensure that regional organizations act under the authority of the UN in areas of peace and security. There have been several resolutions, declarations and reports under different Secretaries-General to rationalize relations between the UN and regional organizations, particularly in peace operations, as well as to craft joint approaches to new and emerging challenges.¹⁶ On other sorts of regionalism, or political groups more generally, the UN Charter is silent.

14 On this point, see Daws, 'The Origins and Development of the UN Electoral Groups', p. 16.

15 Kirkpatrick, 'The United Nations as a Political System', pp. 97-102.

16 Landmark UN reports such as *An Agenda for Peace* (1992), *The Brahimi Report* (2000) and *In Larger Freedom* (2005) have sought to improve coordination between the UN and regional organizations with a special emphasis on peace operations. Since 2011 and the passage of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1977, regional organizations have been called upon to support compliance with Resolution 1540 to prevent the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, and their means of delivery, and to establish appropriate domestic controls over related materials to prevent their illicit trafficking.

Here again, practice has overtaken Charter provisions. Some regional organizations, such as the African Union (AU) and the EU, prioritize partnership with the UN and regularly interact with the UN Secretariat to strengthen the partnership between their organizations.¹⁷ Some observers have noted an increased regionalization of negotiations within international institutions and place regional actors at the centre of this activity.¹⁸ Regional organizations have revealed a propensity to be active *in* and not simply a partner *to* the UN.¹⁹ Of course, a key question in regime or institutional overlap (or nesting) is whether the organizations reinforce or undermine one another.²⁰ While interinstitutional questions are critical for analysing multilateralism more generally, attention in this article is fixed on the diplomatic processes within UN multilateral negotiations. Thus, Diana Panke, Stefan Lang and Anke Wiedemann's conclusion is important: not all regional organizations are equally active within the UN.²¹ They find that regional organizations such as the EU, the Gulf Cooperation Council and CARICOM present more joint statements than the Shanghai Cooperation Council or UNASUR, for instance.

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- 17 African Union, *Framework for a Renewed UN-AU Partnership on Africa's Integration and Development Agendas* (PAIDA), EX.CL/913(XXVII) (Johannesburg, South Africa: African Union, 2015); and European Union, *Saving and Improving Lives: Partnership between the United Nations and the European Union in 2013* (Brussels: United Nations Office in Brussels, 2013).
- 18 Andrej Krickovic, 'All Politics is Regional: Emerging Powers and the Regionalization of Global Governance', *Global Governance*, vol. 21, no. 5 (October-December 2015), pp. 557-577; and Diana Panke 'Regional Power Revisited: How to Explain Differences in Coherency and Success of Regional Organizations in the United Nations General Assembly', *International Negotiation*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2013), pp. 265-291.
- 19 Knud Erik Jørgensen and Ramses A. Wessel, 'The Position of the European Union in (Other) International Organizations: Confronting Legal and Political Approaches', in Panos Koutrakos (ed.), *European Foreign Policy: Legal and Political Perspectives* (New York: Edward Elgar, 2011), pp. 261-286; and Thomas Gehring, *Institutional Interaction in Global Environmental Governance: Synergy and Conflict among International and EU Policies* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).
- 20 Karen J. Alter and Sophie Meunier, 'Nested and Overlapping Regimes in the Transatlantic Banana Trade Dispute', *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2006) pp. 362-382; and Beth A. Simmons and Lisa L. Martin, 'International Organizations and Institutions', in Walter Carlsnaes *et al.* (eds.), *Handbook of International Relations* (New York: Sage, 2002), pp. 192-211.
- 21 Diana Panke, Stefan Lang and Anke Wiedemann, 'Regional Actors in the United Nations: Exploring the Regionalization of International Negotiations', *Global Affairs*, vol. 1, nos. 4-5 (2015), pp. 431-440.

Political Groups

There are a variety of political groups or blocs that range from 'single-issue' groups like the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and the New Agenda Coalition (a non-geographically organized group that is active on issues of nuclear disarmament) to long-standing cross-regional groupings such as the Group of 77 and the OIC, which have a broader range of issues that unite members. Some have UN Observer status and have permanent staff, while others do not. These political groups or blocs are not mandated or constrained by UN rules and resolutions as are the electoral groups; unlike regional organizations, these political groups often emerge from and remain embedded in the UN's multilateral processes.

What is most notable about informal political groups in multilateral processes is their fluidity. Groups can emerge and evolve. The SIDS group, which was active in climate negotiations in the 2000s, has morphed into the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) with different constituent parts, including the Pacific Island States and the Caribbean States. The Middle East electoral group coalesced into the Arab League, which continues to have a political function but no longer a formal, electoral one in the UN. On the other hand, some political groups are long-standing and continue to function even as the original conditions that prompted emergence fade. For example, the Non-Aligned Movement remains active on issues such as the Western Sahara even after the Cold War divisions that prompted its creation have long faded. Membership of groups also changes. Sweden, for instance, was an early and active member of the New Agenda Coalition, which is active on disarmament issues, but has since withdrawn and is active now in other groups.

The Missing Group Politics of UN Multilateralism

Extensive group interaction in conference and General Assembly negotiations create patterns in diplomatic interaction at the UN, and those patterns suggest an organization of multilateral diplomacy that scholars have not yet fully analysed. Observers of the UN make frequent reference to these groups,²² but there has been very little systematic study or conceptual analysis of groups or

22 On the African Group, see Isaac Njoh Endeley, *Bloc Politics at the United Nations: The African Group* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009); on the Nordic Group, see Katie Verlin Laatikainen, 'Norden's Eclipse: The Impact of the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy on the Nordic Group in the United Nations', *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 38, no. 4 (2003), pp. 409-441; on the G-77, see Thomas G. Weiss, 'Moving

how they interact in multilateral processes.²³ Scholars of UN multilateralism tend to fall back too easily on either national interests as explaining outcomes and therefore ignore groups and blocs, or when they do acknowledge the importance of blocs, they assume that all groups function in the same way or have the same approach to UN diplomacy. The EU case shows rather dramatically that its cohesion is the result of treaty obligations on the part of EU member states; the same cannot be said for the African Group or CARICOM. The United Nations — particularly the UN General Assembly — has a particular context that is political, but it is not a political marketplace where states are atomistic, egoistic actors. Groups are the key to understanding political outcomes at the UN, but political groups — how they emerge, how they operate and how they influence outcomes — remain poorly understood.

If groups are so clearly central to UN multilateralism, why is so little research undertaken to understand their role and influence? Scholarship on UN multilateralism falls broadly into two categories at either end of the spectrum of levels of analysis. Studies of the UN are often embedded in scholarship on multilateralism as an institutional form and processes of global governance, both of which are concerned with systemic questions of order in international relations. At the opposite end, multilateral negotiations are frequently analysed from an actor's perspective, focusing on bargaining strategies that optimize the outcomes of individual actors, usually states. The political role of groups in UN diplomacy is often overlooked at both levels, because group dynamics do not easily fit into the core assumptions that drive theorization at either level of analysis. Both scholarly approaches — the question of multilateral order and game-theoretic approaches to negotiation — are also very far removed

Beyond North-South Theatre', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 2, (2009); and Jacqueline Braveboy-Wagner, *Institutions of the Global South* (London: Routledge, 2010).

- 23 See Leigh-Phippard, 'The Influence of Informal Groups in Multilateral Diplomacy' for a descriptive account. Early analyses focused on voting cohesion among blocs. See Thomas Hovet, *Bloc Politics in the United Nations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); Hayward Alker and Bruce Russett, *World Politics in the General Assembly* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965); Bruce Russett, 'Discovering Voting Groups in the United Nations', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 60, no. 2 (June 1966), pp. 327-339; and Jack E. Vincent, 'An Analysis of Caucusing Group Activity at the United Nations', *Journal of Peace Research*, no. 2 (1970), pp. 133-150. Kissack notes the deficiencies of relying on voting cohesion, which can arise without coordination; see Robert E. Kissack, *European Union Member State Coordination in the United Nations Systems: Towards a Methodology for Analysis*, Working Paper no. 1 (London: European Foreign Policy Unit, London School of Economics, 2007).

from the day-to-day work of diplomacy at the UN. Group dynamics, which are very clear to the diplomats engaged in diplomacy at the UNGA and at UN conferences, are largely ignored by theories and concepts of multilateralism and global governance, which focus instead on systemic outcomes and order, as well as negotiations and bargaining literature that focus on the atomistic preferences and behaviours of actors.

Global Governance and Multilateralism: An Aversion to Politics

Multilateralism is a thriving area of study that draws on a diverse set of conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Legal approaches to multilateralism examine outputs of multilateral diplomacy as well as the standing of international legal norms, which is central to international law.²⁴ Scholars of international law have increasingly focused on questions that highlight the role of institutions in shaping behaviour, including compliance.²⁵ Because 'global governance refers to governance aimed at dealing with transsovereign, (potentially) global problems and at producing global public goods', Andreas Kruck and Volker Rittberger argue that 'a multilateral world order reliant on rules-based inter-state policy coordination lies at the heart of many scholarly notions of global governance today'.²⁶ This structural preoccupation with order in the absence of authoritative government is a central theme in studies of global governance. But the politics of how the international community gets to that outcome in which rules-based inter-state policy coordination occurs is rarely the central focus of global governance scholarship.

Multilateralism as an institutional form has been the subject of intense academic scrutiny in the two and a half decades since the end of the Cold

24 See, for example, Gabriella Blum, 'Bilateralism, Multilateralism, and the Architecture of International Law', *Harvard International Law Journal*, vol. 49, no. 2 (2008), pp. 323-379; and Bart Van Vooren, Steven Blockmans and Jan Wouters (eds.), *The EU's Role in Global Governance: The Legal Dimension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

25 Anne-Marie Slaughter, Andrew S. Tulumello and Stephan Wood, 'International Law and International Relations Theory: A New Generation of Interdisciplinary Scholarship', *American Journal of International Law*, vol. 92, no. 3 (July 1998), pp. 367-397; and Harold Hongju Koh, 'Why Do Nations Obey International Law?', *Yale Faculty Scholarship Series*, Paper no. 2101 (1997), pp. 2599-2659, available online at http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss_papers/2101.

26 Andreas Kruck and Volker Rittberger. 'Multilateralism Today and its Contribution to Global Governance', in James P. Muldoon *et al.* (eds.), *The New Dynamics of Multilateralism: Diplomacy, International Organizations and Global Governance* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2010), pp. 44-47.

War. Almost 30 years ago, Robert Keohane introduced a distinction between multilateralism as an international institution and corporeal international organizations such as the UN.²⁷ For John Ruggie, multilateralism is 'a generic institutional' form that can take many concrete shapes.²⁸ The many institutional forms of multilateralism have come into focus, particularly the so-called 'minilateral' formulations of the G-x systems.²⁹ In addition to the varying numerical forms of multilateralism, scholars such as Luk Van Langenhove focus on the emergence of multilateralism that includes non-state actors in what he terms 'multilateralism 2.0'.³⁰

The rich varieties of multilateralism — from the UN, EU and ASEAN varieties to the more informal G-x formulations — are all manifestations of multilateralism, according to Ruggie. He admonishes:

[I]t is important not to confuse the very meaning of multilateralism with any one particular institutional expression of it, be it an international order, regime, or organization. Each can be, but need not be, multilateral in form. In addition, the multilateral form should not be equated with universal geographical scope; the attributes of multilateralism characterize relations within specific collectivities that may and often do fall short of the whole universe of nations.³¹

The 'multilateral system' is the universe of multilateral organizations, international law and multilateral principles, norms and politics. However, the study of multilateralism has been shaped by the search for these general ordering principles that Ruggie identified as being central to multilateralism, so that the

27 Robert O. Keohane, 'Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research', *International Journal*, vol. 45, no. 4 (autumn 1990), pp. 731-764.

28 John G. Ruggie, 'Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution', *International Organization*, vol. 46, no. 3 (1992), p. 567.

29 John J. Kirton, *G20 Governance for a Globalized World* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013); Risto Penttilä, *Multilateralism Light: The Rise of Informal International Governance* (London: Centre for European Reform, 2009), available online at http://www.cer.org.uk/pdf/penttila_essay_july09.pdf; Peter Debaere, *EU Coordination in International Institutions: Policy and Process in Gx Forums* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); and Juha Jokela, 'Europe's Declining Role in the G20: What Role for the EU in the Club of the Most Important Powers?', FIIA Briefing Paper, no. 96 (Helsinki: Finish Institute of International Affairs, 2011).

30 Luk Van Langenhove, 'The Transformation of Multilateralism Mode 1.0 to Mode 2.0', *Global Policy*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2010), pp. 263-270.

31 Ruggie, 'Multilateralism', p. 574.

varieties of multilateralism — and the politics behind them — have become obscured. Michael Barnett, for instance, shows how the broadening concept of security has influenced multilateral security organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the UN Security Council, a normative development that he calls ‘humanized multilateralism’, in comparison to earlier, state-centric conceptualizations of security that might be found in the UN Charter.³²

Whether the focus is on the institutional forms of multilateralism or its ordering norms and principles, the underlying premise of scholarship on multilateralism and global governance is the existence of a broader international order that constrains anarchical relations. In the words of several observers, multilateralism is ‘an existential reality’,³³ ‘multilateralism is no longer a choice. It is a matter of necessity and of fact’,³⁴ and ‘we are all multilateralists now’.³⁵ The study of multilateralism in all its diversity is an attempt to unpack the structural mechanisms — either organizational forms and/or shared norms — that condition the interests, preferences and even participation of actors.

The fact that multilateralism focuses our attention on institutional and normative orders is not surprising, but it does shift attention away from politics towards *shared rules and norms* about which there appear to be consensus. Most scholars of global governance or multilateralism seem to have an aversion to politics. Robert Cox is among a handful of (largely Gramscian) scholars focusing on multilateralism and global governance who emphasizes how multilateralism and global governance are inextricably tied to the politics of world order.³⁶ But while Cox is keenly interested in the power and politics that

32 Michael Barnett, ‘Is Multilateralism Bad for Humanitarianism?’, in Dimitris Bourantonis, Kostas Ifantiss and Panayotis Tsakonas (eds.), *Multilateralism and Security Institutions in an Era of Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 139-141.

33 Arthur Stein, ‘Incentive Compatibility and Global Governance: Existential Multilateralism, a Weakly Confederal World and Hegemony’, in Alan S. Alexandroff (ed.), *Can the World Be Governed? Possibilities for Effective Multilateralism* (Waterloo, CA: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), p. 50.

34 Shepard Forman, ‘Multilateralism as a Matter of Fact: US Leadership and the Management of the International Public Sector’, in Stewart Patrick and Shepard Forman (eds.), *Multilateralism and US Foreign Policy: Ambivalent Engagement* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), p. 439.

35 Richard Haass, ‘The Case for Messy Multilateralism’, *Financial Times* (5 January 2010), p. 5.

36 Robert W. Cox, ‘Multilateralism and World Order’, in Robert W. Cox and T.J. Sinclair (eds.), *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 494-523.

support or subvert world order, his analysis remains firmly entrenched in a structural approach. The *politics* of multilateralism, particularly in the UN context, are viewed derisively by many scholars of multilateralism, when they are considered at all. According to Pierre de Senarclens, UN multilateralism allows diplomats:

[...] an opportunity to deliberate, interact on a personal level, ritualize through complicated procedures and ceremonials the manifestation of their state sovereignty, maintain through rhetoric and propaganda their own national authority and their international legitimacy, find ways and means to play out their conflict on a symbolic level, and also to benefit occasionally from the program resources allocated by the system.³⁷

While de Senarclens is most certainly correct that the UN context provides member-state diplomats with a privileged position to parade their national prerogatives, the findings of this special issue of *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* are that — in the context of UN multilateral diplomacy — such an emphasis on national proclivities is quite often constrained by multilateral group interaction.

Bargaining and Problem-solving in International Negotiations

At the other end of the spectrum of levels of analysis, UN diplomats are involved in a dizzying array of negotiations over resolutions, treaties and other sorts of agreements. At this level, the politics of who gets what and when are front and centre. Christer Jönsson notes that international negotiation is a thriving sub-field of international relations that is studied from a variety of disciplines, from diplomatic history to economics and to sociology and social psychology.³⁸ While bilateral negotiations form the basis for most negotiation theory, additional parties increase complexity.³⁹ Bargaining has been dominated by game-theoretic approaches, including efforts to model coalition and small group

37 Pierre de Senarclens, 'The UN as a Social and Economic Regulator', in Pierre de Senarclens and Ali Kazancigil (eds.), *Regulatory Globalization: Critical Approaches to Global Governance* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 12-13.

38 Christer Jönsson, 'Diplomacy, Bargaining and Negotiation', in Walter Carlsnaes *et al.* (eds.), *Handbook of International Relations* (London: Sage, 2002), pp. 212-234.

39 Larry Crumb and I. William Zartman, 'Multilateral Negotiation and the Management of Complexity', *International Negotiation*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2003), pp. 1-5.

behaviour and the dynamics of the multilateral negotiation phases.⁴⁰ Terrence Hopmann identifies two approaches in international negotiations — namely, bargaining and problem-solving.⁴¹ Bargaining, in particular, focuses on international negotiations from a game-theoretic actor perspective, which often assumes that actors have preferences and that they bargain to maximize utility in a rational calculus. Problem-solving approaches capture the more deliberative multilateralism of UN processes. One area of the negotiation literature that has focused on the dynamics of multilateralism in a productive way has been the work focusing on coalitions. Fen Osler Hampson and Michael Hart argue that multilateral negotiations involve coalition-building, coalition-bridging and coalition-breaking, and cross-cutting coalitions may be as important as reinforcing ones.⁴² While there has been some analysis of coalitions in international trade and environmental negotiations⁴³ and analysis of leadership in multilateral negotiations,⁴⁴ Christer Jönsson concludes that ‘multilateral

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- 40 See a variety of efforts, including Christopher Dupont, ‘Negotiation as Coalition Building’, *International Negotiation*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1996), pp. 47-64; Arturo Gomes, ‘Multilateral Negotiations and the Formation of Coalitions’, *Journal of Mathematical Economics*, vol. 59 (2015), pp. 77-91; and Fritz van Merode, Anna Nieboer, Hans Maarse and Harm Lieverdink, ‘Analyzing the Dynamics in Multilateral Negotiations’, *Social Networks*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2004), pp. 141-154.
- 41 P. Terrence Hopmann, ‘Bargaining and Problem Solving: Two Perspectives on International Negotiation’, in Charles A. Crocker, Fen O. Hampson and Pamela Aall (eds.), *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict* (Washington, DC: US Institute for Peace, 2001), pp. 445-468.
- 42 Fen Osler Hampson with Michael Hart, *Multilateral Negotiations: Lessons from Arms Control, Trade and Environment* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).
- 43 See Peter Drahos, ‘When the Weak Bargain with the Strong: Negotiations in the World Trade Organization’, *International Negotiation*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2003); John Odell, *Negotiating Trade: Developing Countries in the WTO and NAFTA* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); J.P. Singh, ‘Weak Powers and Globalism: The Impact of Plurality on Weak-Strong Negotiations in the International Economy’, *International Negotiation*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2000); Pamela S. Chasek, ‘Margins of Power: Coalition Building and Coalition Maintenance of the South Pacific Island States and the Alliance of Small Island States’, *Review of European Community and International Environmental Law*, vol. 14, no. 2 (August 2005).
- 44 For example, Oran Young, ‘Political Leadership and Regime Formation: On the Development of Institutions in International Society’, *International Organization*, vol. 45, no. 3 (1991), pp. 281-308.

negotiation is an area of theoretical underdevelopment but of growing scholarly concern.⁴⁵

While sophisticated models may show how preferences shift or how coalitions influence bargaining, the assumption of instrumentality is difficult to shake, even in studies of coalitions in multilateral negotiations. Although they employ a model of arguing as a mode of communication where the power of reason (rather than material bargaining power/leverage) prevails, Cornelia Ulbert and Thomas Risse find that ‘multilateral diplomatic negotiations constitute “hard cases” for arguing, since deliberation as such is not the purpose of such talks but to accomplish certain goals including the maximization of interest of the negotiating partners.’⁴⁶ This intensive focus on instrumentality or utility may be reasonable when applied to cases of the multilateral negotiations over climate change or non-proliferation treaties that are hallmarks of the multilateral negotiation literature, but they capture only a portion of what constitutes UN multilateralism. The annual meetings of the UNGA and the Human Rights Council involve intensive diplomatic negotiation and debate, but towards what end? What is it that diplomats hope to accomplish in UNGA negotiations? International consensus on addressing issues of common concern seems an obvious response, but the vague ‘consensus’ that results from UNGA negotiations is rarely a foundation for effective multilateral policy formulation, let alone robust problem-solving. Are diplomats merely pursuing their countries’ national interest? The vast agenda of the United Nations General Assembly touches on so many issues that most states will not have an interest in every topic addressed; many smaller states, in particular, do not have the human resources to develop concrete positions, even on issues of direct concern. The UN in New York is not an authoritative body where binding legislation emanates (excepting the Security Council’s use of Chapter VII), or where treaties are negotiated, nor is it usually an arena for the pursuit of naked national interest. Multilateral negotiations *do* occur in a deliberative fashion at the UN, and they are channelled through groups in a social dynamic that the multilateral negotiation literature has not fully grasped.

45 Jönsson, ‘Diplomacy, Bargaining and Negotiation’, p. 223.

46 Cornelia Ulbert and Thomas Risse, ‘Deliberately Changing the Discourse: What Does Make Arguing Effective?’, *Acta Politica*, vol. 40 (2005), pp. 351-367.

The Diplomatic Practice of Group Politics in UN Multilateralism

The pervasive practice of group politics at the UN is obscured by both the theories of multilateralism that are focused on structural and normative orders and the theories of bargaining and negotiation that often assume the instrumental rationality of atomistic actors. Recent theorizing in diplomatic studies, however, rests on a meso-level of analysis that enables a social conceptualization of group dynamics in UN multilateralism. Jan Melissen captures this meso-level of analysis when he observes that a key distinguishing feature of diplomatic studies:

[...] is its focus on *relationships* between international actors rather than their internal characteristics and objectives, or the context in which they operate. [...] Alien to mainstream IR and too vague for methodological purists, such a relationalist perspective is fundamental to the practice of diplomacy and for students of diplomacy.⁴⁷

Geoffrey Wiseman suggests that

diplomatic studies can generally be distinguished from such fields as international organizations and global governance by virtue of the priority it accords the *practice* (procedures, tactics, means) of IR and diplomacy as distinct from the *theory* (substance, strategy, ends).⁴⁸

This coheres with the argument of Ole Jacob Sending, Vincent Pouliot and Iver Neumann:

[...] from a relational perspective, it does not make sense to say that an institution — such as international law or multilateralism or sovereignty — structures or secures a certain order. It is the continual use or performance of the material and symbolic resources that are

47 Jan Melissen, 'Diplomatic Studies in the Right Season', *International Studies Review*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2011), p. 724.

48 Geoffrey Wiseman, 'Norms and Diplomacy: The Diplomatic Underpinnings of Multilateralism', in J.P. Muldoon *et al.* (eds.), *The New Dynamics of Multilateralism: Diplomacy, International Organizations and Global Governance* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2011), p. 6.

recognized as being vested in these institutions that helps produce and reproduce certain orders.⁴⁹

As Wiseman notes, a key challenge for practice-based theorizing is that such practices 'become so deeply internalized over the years that many scholars no longer appreciated their regulative, evaluative, constitutive, and practical effects'.⁵⁰ Excavating and elucidating these international practices transcends the unit of analysis dilemmas that are associated with studying UN multilateralism from either a global governance or negotiation perspective.⁵¹ Practice is a form of action, which 'differs from preferences or beliefs, which it expresses, and from discourse or institutions, which it instantiates'.⁵² Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot also note that practice tends to reflect patterns of regularity over time, and that social recognition is a fundamental aspect of practice. Indeed, the practice of group politics in UN multilateralism transcends the problem of level of analysis, because the practice is both individual (agential) and structural.⁵³ In his analysis of the practice of permanent representation in international organizations, Vincent Pouliot finds that 'the multiparty structure of permanent representation generates a rather peculiar diplomacy of groups'.⁵⁴ Yet the practice of group diplomacy (as distinct from coalition) remains underdeveloped.

The Practice of Political Groups in UN Diplomacy

The attributes of UN multilateralism identified by Geoff Berridge — that is, universal membership based on equality, majoritarian voting, and essentially public debates⁵⁵ — have prompted some scholars to use the term 'parliamentary

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- 49 Ole Jacob Sending, Vincent Pouliot and Iver Neumann, 'Introduction', in O.J. Sending, V. Pouliot and I.B. Neumann (eds.), *Diplomacy and the Making of World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 7.
- 50 Geoffrey Wiseman. 'Bringing Theory Back In: Time for Theory to Catch Up with Practice', *International Studies Review*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2011), p. 712.
- 51 Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, 'International Practices', *International Theory*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2011).
- 52 Adler and Pouliot, 'International Practices', p. 6.
- 53 Adler and Pouliot, 'International Practices', p. 16.
- 54 Vincent Pouliot. 'The Practice of Permanent Representation at International Organizations', in Sending, Pouliot and Neumann (eds.), *Diplomacy and the Making of World Politics*, p. 95.
- 55 G.R. Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* (London: Palgrave, 3rd edition 2005). Berridge argues that there may be a diplomatic deficiency in the emergence of multilateral

diplomacy' to describe the nature of politics at the UN.⁵⁶ Multilateral diplomacy in the UN context is organized in ways that are somewhat similar to parliamentary politics, where different parties function to aggregate interests and facilitate communication.⁵⁷ Yet in respect to group politics, to characterize UN politics as parliamentary diplomacy obscures as much as it elucidates. As H.G. Nichols asks, 'Where are the parties? Where are the whips, where are the usual channels? [...] Where is the discipline?'⁵⁸ Political groups in the UN do not function exactly like parties, but they do shape negotiations in regular patterns. Parliamentary parties exist not only to pass legislation, but to ensure the continued participation of party members in parliamentary seats through electoral processes. In multilateral processes, electoral and negotiation group memberships are often distinct (see Table 1 above). Decisions about how and when to participate in group negotiations are not well understood, even by participants. As Nichols argues, UN political groups — unlike parliamentary political parties — do not exercise consistent discipline over members, because member states have permanent membership once they are admitted to the UN.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the decision of a particular delegation at the UN to participate in group or bloc negotiations is entirely voluntary. Each delegation has the possibility to decide not to align with a particular political group (although they are assigned to the regional groups for electoral purposes to other UN bodies), or to decide to work within a different political group on different issues (although the EU requires solidarity among all members if a common position has been agreed). Parliamentary politics cannot be understood without understanding the role of parties, even though parties are rarely mentioned in national constitutions; similarly, UN politics cannot be understood without understanding the critical role of groups in diplomatic processes. However, conceptualizing UN politics as *parliamentary* distorts the understanding of the role of groups in the political process, because the practice is

bodies with universal membership. He argues that 'universal membership may well be anti-diplomatic, gratuitously worsening relations between states that in an earlier era would either have had little contact at all or would have contact only on issues where both had a direct interest' (p. 164).

56 See Frans W. Weisglas and Gonnée de Boer, 'Parliamentary Diplomacy', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2007), pp. 93-99.

57 See Courtney B. Smith, *Politics and Process at the United Nations: The Global Dance* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2006), especially chapter 3.

58 H.G. Nichols, *The United Nations as a Political Institution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 5th edition 1975), p. 104.

59 Nichols, *The United Nations as a Political Institution*, p. 105.

far less institutionalized than it is for parties, given the permanent representation of UN member states.⁶⁰

The deliberative nature of UN multilateralism, particularly in the standing committees of the UNGA and other political arenas, reflects a practice of politicized diplomacy. While negotiation theory may capture the interest-driven behaviour in specific conferences that are devoted to regulatory international agreements (for instance, on the Non-Proliferation Treaty or the UNFCCC), diplomacy in the quasi-legislative bodies of the UN is shaped by contestation over the essentially normative output of the deliberations. Diplomats argue over words in non-binding resolutions because they are engaged in politics.⁶¹ Alan Henrikson observes that one plausible future that results from this new diplomacy is that there is ‘more and more, an approximation and even assimilation of “international relations” to the model of domestic American politics.’⁶² While Henrikson was focusing on the need to ‘lobby’ when engaging in bilateral diplomatic relations with the United States — that for diplomatic counterparts, the US State Department as the typical diplomatic interlocutor no longer suffices — his point about the domestication of diplomacy bears fruit in the multilateral context more broadly.

So how can we begin to approach the role of informal groups in a more systematic and conceptual way than has been the case so far? The role of informal groups is as under studied in other political contexts as it is in multilateralism. One exception has been Alan Feillen’s framework to examine the role of informal groups in legislative institutions, as opposed to parties or institutional structures.⁶³ Feillen defines informal groups as ‘an identifiable, self-conscious, relatively stable unit of interacting members whose relationships are not officially prescribed by statutes and rules.’⁶⁴ He provides some preliminary hypotheses that can be adapted to study the practice of group politics in the UN context, as demonstrated in Table 2.⁶⁵

60 Pouliot, ‘The Practice of Permanent Representation’, pp. 96-98.

61 Ulbert and Risse, ‘Deliberately Changing the Discourse’.

62 Alan K. Henrikson, ‘Diplomacy’s Possible Futures’, *Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2006), p. 21.

63 Alan Feillen, ‘The Function of Informal Groups in Legislative Institutions’, *Journal of Politics*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1962), pp. 72-91. Very little scholarly work has been produced about the role of informal groups since Feillen’s piece. Most work on groups examines the role of outsider interest groups rather than informal groups of decision-makers in the political process. This is similar to the focus on NGOs in multilateral processes.

64 Feillen, ‘The Function of Informal Groups in Legislative Institutions’, p. 76.

65 Feillen, ‘The Function of Informal Groups in Legislative Institutions’, pp. 89-90.

TABLE 2 *Applying informal group functions to UN group diplomacy*

Feillen's Hypotheses on Informal Group Functions in Legislative Processes	Application to Political Groups in UN Multilateral Diplomacy
Groups perform manifest and latent functions (and dysfunctions) for the members and institutions; and bloc behaviour is related to political strategy and goal attainment.	In the UN context, groups aggregate votes and provide a means of information-gathering, brokering interests, and organizing participation in relation to goal attainment
Informal groups are the principle socializing agencies in such legislatures; and members learn role expectations and institutional norms within informal groups.	While representation is permanent, diplomats come and go from the missions in New York; groups help diplomats find their way through the demanding agendas and technical nature of negotiations.
Informal groups may provide 'cover' for behaviour that is judged to be deviant from institutional norms.	In the UN context, some member states use groups to advance national agendas in a way that can cause damage to the group. ⁶⁶
Decisions/positions of legislators depend on informal group memberships.	In the UN context, not all member states have a national interest at stake in every negotiation, and yet as Berridge notes, states in universal membership bodies are expected to deliberate whether they have an interest or not. ⁶⁷
Informal groups structure otherwise loose institutional environments; politics in such environments occurs within and between these groups and their channels — for example, negotiation, compromise and the formation of coalitions.	While the UN privileges member states, the multilateral context for diplomacy means that politics at the UN are channelled through a variety of groups — from regional organizations to single-issue, cross-national coalitions.

SOURCE: AUTHOR.

66 Venezuela has often pursued an anti-US agenda in its group affiliations, and ultimately formed its own group for that purpose (ALBA).

67 Berridge, *Diplomacy*, p. 164.

What becomes immediately apparent when assessing these hypotheses is that informal groups have to be approached with a very particular methodology. While it is important to examine official proceedings and to analyse voting behaviour and other observable indicators that are available, the informal nature of groups means that they do not often leave an empirical footprint. Diplomats, as scholars of diplomatic practice note, take the practice of group consultations for granted. Thus, any analysis of groups necessarily entails observation of the practice or interviewing participants. It is only through such interrogation that the impact of these diplomatic practices can be assessed. Jan Melissen is correct that such an approach may too vague for methodological purists,⁶⁸ but purity is too high a price if we lose a critically important insight on UN multilateralism.

Conclusion: A Plea for Political Perspective on UN Multilateralism

Group dynamics in UN diplomacy reminds us that what diplomats do in practice in the UN's multilateral environment is often less about pursuing the national interest than about engaging in politics, despite their sovereign diplomatic prerogatives. The UN's multilateral context is a miasma of the current world diplomatic system, where at least three types of diplomacy — public, multilateral and polyilateral — are conducted simultaneously.⁶⁹ It is an inherently political diplomacy. Politicized diplomacy acknowledges the political institutional context of UN diplomacy, which differs from treaty negotiations, where interests dictate process and goal attainment focuses political energies. Performance in such negotiations is measured by how much of a participant's objectives were attained in the final agreement. In the deliberative processes at the UN, however, the assumptions of goal attainment are rocky at best. Sponsors of a resolution may have a goal, and opponents may object to certain provisions and lobby against them, but a great number of those involved in negotiations may not have strong feelings one way or another. The fact that 80 per cent of UNGA resolutions are passed by consensus is a stark illustration of this. The impossibility of imagining an international treaty being adopted

68 Melissen, 'Diplomatic Studies in the Right Season', p. 724.

69 Public diplomacy is generally the effort to influence not foreign governments but foreign societies or publics; multilateral diplomacy is the practice of coordinating policy by three or more states (Keohane) according to general principles (Ruggie); polyilateral diplomacy involves the broader engagement of civil society in multilateral diplomatic processes. See Wiseman, 'Bringing Theory Back In', p. 712.

by acclamation points to the very different political contexts of UNGA multilateralism and of international negotiations that result in binding treaties. Outcomes of these politicized deliberations do not result in policies that are implemented, but in 'frameworks for action' and 'correct' understandings of an issue. Policy governance often occurs elsewhere in the UN system. Diplomacy in the UN's deliberative bodies is fundamentally political, where members are engaged in positioning — among one another, for leadership, and for ideas. Multilateral debates are used not only to pursue national interests, but often to pursue broader ideological or normative agendas.

The intersection of all of these forces and the practice of group politics is anathema to many. Geoffrey Wiseman depicts Harold Nicholson, an early scholar of diplomatic studies, as a staunch critic of the multilateral method or conference diplomacy — 'the American method' — precisely because it politicized what should be discreet and confidential.⁷⁰ Indeed, Inis Claude observed that 'Voting is a concept alien to the traditional system for the management of international relations'.⁷¹ Despite this aversion to politics by diplomatic and UN scholars, Wiseman observes that: 'Multilateral diplomatic practices (for example, voting, parliamentary style speech-making, speaking directly to publics) are now *taken for granted*'.⁷² The reality of group politics in UN multilateral diplomacy is often observed but is left unanalysed because of this aversion to politics in the study of multilateral diplomacy at the UN. A focus on group politics — which are often divisive — when the international community seeks solutions to collective problems may seem to be a sideshow at best and exasperating at worst, but ignoring politics does not make politics disappear. Jan Melissen hits the nail on the head:

The predominant focus in diplomatic studies on diplomacy as an institution, as well as on processes, change and innovation in diplomatic modes, has been to the detriment of exploring the power–diplomacy nexus. [...] The issue of power — fundamental to all questions in political science — should not be omitted from the equation.⁷³

70 Wiseman, 'Norms and Diplomacy', pp. 7-8.

71 Inis Claude Jr., *Swords into Plowshares: The Problems and Progress of International Organization* (New York: Random House, 3rd edition, 1965), p. 111.

72 Wiseman, 'Norms and Diplomacy', p. 14 (italics added).

73 Melissen, 'Diplomatic Studies in the Right Season', p. 725.

A political perspective need not lead to cynicism.⁷⁴ Politics can be the well-spring of social change, which is exponentially more difficult in a setting as diverse and challenging as the United Nations. Adam Watson has argued that the United Nations is a distinctive omnilateral institution, and omnilateral institutions are notable because they focus on the collective responsibility of participants, not simply their prerogatives.⁷⁵ A clear question that emerges from a consideration of the practice of group politics is whether they contribute to, or detract from, the realization of collective responsibility among members. It may be that groups introduce a divisive element that makes it impossible to conceptualize, let alone to realize, collective responsibility. Thomas Weiss has made this argument.⁷⁶ Harold Nicholson was wary of multilateral diplomacy for introducing sordid parliamentary politics into diplomacy, which he believed should be quiet and discreet.

However, it may also be that in an omnilateral context, groups are 'made to be broken'.⁷⁷ Although the UN is a universal organization that is premised upon the idea of collective responsibility, it is perhaps unrealistic to assume that a diplomat whose credentials are permanently to represent one's national interest in multilateral settings should naturally think in terms of or assume collective responsibility. Part of the practice of UN diplomacy is the socialization of actors; groups socialize diplomats into broader communities of identity and affinity. Groups are not what Robert Keohane was referring to when discussing global governance and democratic accountability,⁷⁸ but rather what Alan Henrikson describes as 'a system of representation of points of view as well as an expression of persons. I refer not to the points of view of individual countries as "countries" or to the points of view of clusters of countries as "regions" in the voting group sense, but rather to their situational point of view'.⁷⁹

In this way, group politics in the practice of UN diplomacy may serve to broaden affinities beyond the national interest, to strengthen the bonds of

74 For an original analysis of how parties and partisanship serve to regulate rivalries and make effective pluralist politics possible, see Nancy L. Rosenblum, *On the Side of Angels: An Appreciation for Parties and Partisanship* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

75 Adam Watson, *Diplomacy: The Dialogue Between States* (London: Routledge, 1982), p. 146.

76 Weiss, 'Moving Beyond North-South Theatre'.

77 This is the argument in some coalition literature; see Hampson with Hart, *Multilateral Negotiations*.

78 Robert O. Keohane, 'Global Governance and Democratic Accountability', in David Held and Mathias K. Archibugi (eds), *The Taming Globalization: Frontiers of Governance* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003).

79 Henrikson, 'Diplomacy's Possible Futures', p. 15.

multilateralism and to promote a concept of collective responsibility. Any diplomat may invoke the collective in negotiations; groups embody them. The notion of the international community may be a myth, but it is a socially useful concept. The focus of this special issue of *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* is an innovative effort to heed Geoffrey Wiseman's exhortation that 'we need to learn a lot more about mutual socialization in multilateral settings'.⁸⁰

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80 Wiseman, 'Norms and Diplomacy', p. 15.

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