

GETTING IT WRONG ON SECURITY COUNCIL REFORM

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Introduction:

On December 2, 2004, Kofi Annan's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change delivered to the UN General Assembly its eagerly anticipated report, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*. On the whole, it is a rather forward-looking document and I would readily support most of its 101 recommendations. In two respects, however, I believe the document comes up short.

First, while most of what the report does say is good, I am troubled by its failure to deal adequately with certain issues. The report's recommendations relate mainly to the so-called "hard threats" to security, especially terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. These are concerns most keenly felt by the fifth of humanity living in the world's affluent nations. The "soft threats," those of primary concern to the other four-fifths of humanity – poverty, disease, malnutrition, illiteracy, un- and under-employment, environmental degradation and so forth – are given relatively short shrift, being discussed in only six pages out of a total of 97. The problem is finessed by the panel's endorsement of the UN Millennium Goals adopted by the General Assembly in the year 2000. But offering lip service to those goals is all-too-easy. Meaningful action on achieving those goals is already well behind schedule. How to invigorate the drive for universal human decency is inadequately discussed.

Second, some of the panel's recommendations for basic institutional reforms, especially in respect to the General Assembly and the Security Council, are, in my view, seriously misguided. In the balance of this paper I shall confine my remarks to the report's recommendations on the Security Council. I shall first demonstrate the practical and conceptual failings of the report, then set forth a set of desiderata for workable and just reform, and will conclude with brief presentations of reform scenarios preferable to the two alternatives, designated as "Plan A" and "Plan B," suggested by the panel.

Representativeness versus Efficiency:

The principal basis for calls to enlarge the Security Council hinges on the assertion that fifteen seats are no longer sufficient to represent the interests of the diverse group of 191 nations now comprising the United Nations. That appears to be a legitimate argument. Over the period since 1972, when the representative of mainland China was first seated, the combined population of the ever-changing cohort of fifteen Security Council members averaged not quite 43% of the world's total population and ranged from a low of 33% to a high of 58%. Under the proposed Plans A and B, I would anticipate that the total population represented in the Council at any given time would rise substantially, and

fluctuate within a relatively narrow range, probably from 62% to 67% of the world total. That is certainly a plus.

However, as is well known, the efficiency of any deliberative body decreases, some would say exponentially, with size. Thus, it is reasonable to wonder whether the panel's proposed enlargement to twenty-four members might prove to be counter-productive given the fact that, in matters of war and peace, expeditious action is often needed. This argues for fewer seats than the twenty-four that the panel recommends.

As I have demonstrated in my monograph, *Revitalization of the United Nations: Reform through Weighted Voting* (which all members of ACUNS should have received in the mail last year), it is possible to represent more than 90% of the world's population on a sustained basis in a Council of only eighteen seats. And, in a subsequent essay, "Regional Representation as a Basis for Security Council Reform" (copies of which you can obtain at this meeting), I demonstrate how one can have universal representation in a Council of only twelve seats. I will illustrate these assertions later in this presentation. In short, then, twenty-four seats are too many.

Misallocation of Seats:

But, even if I were to accept the necessity of enlarging the Security Council to twenty-four seats, I would still question the wisdom of the panel's recommendation that they be distributed equally among four great regional blocs: Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe. These blocs would supersede the five from which holders of non-permanent seats have been selected since 1966.

Here (figure one¹) is a graphic representation of the only relevant numerical data presented in the report. The number and types of seats are shown in the first and second columns for each region, relating to Plans A and B respectively, while the number of states per region, as a percentage of the total of 191 is shown in the third column. The absolute numbers vary within a rather narrow range, from a low of 38 for the Americas to a high of 56 for Asia and the Pacific. While these suggest the essential fairness of the proposal, the presentation is, in my view, disingenuous. This becomes clear when one considers the very large number of UN Member states that are relatively inconsequential players in global and UN affairs. This illustration (figure two) will help make the point. China, with 1.3 billion people counts as but a single state as does Tuvalu, with a population of only 11,000. And the 96 UN members with populations at or below the median figure of 6.3 million (the population of Burundi) collectively account for only 3.4 % of the world's total! If we consider (figure three) the disparities among states in respect to GNP or contributions to the UN budget, the range of discrepancies among nations is even more pronounced. To what extent, we must ask, can states ranked toward the lower end of the graphs on display contribute significantly to global security? If they can't, why is their number of any importance?

Now, here are some more fundamental regional data (figure four) that the panel's report – for whatever reason – neglected to provide. Especially striking, as shown by the bars in blue, is the fact that Asia and the Pacific, with more than 61% of the world's people, is

¹ All figures are placed after the text.

allocated only six seats while the three remaining regions, with a combined population of less than 39%, are allocated eighteen! Does that strike you as equitable? “Equal” is not a synonym for “equitable.” No less remarkable is the fact that the 53 nations of Africa collectively contribute only 1.2% of the total UN regular budget (less than Switzerland alone) and account for only 1.8% of the gross world product; yet, they are allocated six seats, the same as Europe, which contributes 41.5% of the total budget and accounts for 31.4% of the gross world product. Europe, the Americas, and Africa all have populations well below a fourth that of Asia. In respect to Europe and the Americas, one might make a case for seating parity with Asia based on their contributing more than Asia does to the UN budget. But no such argument can possibly be made in respect to Africa.

Thus, there remains only one arguable basis for assigning six seats to Africa, namely that it is a distinct continent containing a rather large number of countries, 53 in all, or 27.7% of the UN total. But reflect just a bit on Africa’s political map. For the most part it represents the fossilization of a set of decisions made by politicians sitting around a conference table in Berlin in 1884-’85. Their profound ignorance of the continent they were then partitioning was matched only by their nationalistic greed and lack of concern for the welfare of their subjects to be. Additionally, especially in the cases of French West and French Equatorial Africa, there was a subsequent proliferation of weak states because of the arbitrary division of those territories by the European colonial authorities. If one objects to the anachronistic privileged position in the Security Council of the five permanent members, a position deriving from the outcome of World War II, then one ought, even more, to question the inviolability of the territorial outcomes of colonialism.

While it was not within the panel’s purview to critique Africa’s history and current political geography, I am not similarly constrained. So, let me suggest, if only in passing, that Africa’s having fifty-three countries is more of a curse than a blessing and that, difficult though its achievement might be, a United States of Africa – or perhaps of Africa south of the Sahara – would be far preferable to the present political dispensation. Rewarding political fragmentation by the granting of Security Council seats provides a disincentive for eventual African unification. To the extent that this is so, it is a bad idea.

Inadequacy of the Panel’s Regional Schema:

Throughout the world, classes in modern geography divide our planet into continental divisions as if that were somehow the most natural and important way of beginning a study of the earth’s diversity. So it is hardly surprising that the panel should have resorted to regional nomenclature based essentially on long-standing continental designations and that such a division (figure five) would be accepted uncritically by most readers. The logic of the division, however, calls for scrutiny. Few persons are aware of the classical Greek origins of our continental worldview or recognize the Western cultural imperialism undergirding its global canonical status. Almost twenty-five hundred years ago, the Greeks decided that whatever lay to the west of the Aegean Sea was Europe and whatever lay to the east was Asia. Africa was added to the roster of continents a bit later. But consider the unbroken landmass of Eurasia. Europe is but one of several recognizable sub-continents, much less well set off from the whole than is the far more populous and diverse Indian subcontinent, or, for that matter, than Southwest, East or Southeast Asia. In fact, in the panel’s thinking, “Asia” is defined by exclusion, being the part of Eurasia that isn’t “Europe.” And, paradoxically, as you can easily see, well over

half the area designated by the panel as “Europe” actually lies in what is conventionally regarded as Asia, that is the area to the east of the Ural Mountains and to the south of the Caucasus.

In none of the great cosmological traditions of Asia – Islamic, Hindu, or Buddhist – was there a mental construct of such a continent. In short, Asians didn’t know they were Asians until Europeans informed them of that fact. Comparable observations could, of course, be made in respect to Africans, Native Americans, and Australian aborigines. Nevertheless, due to a certain shared history, some sense of continental solidarity did emerge in Africa and the Americas; and this is reflected in the creation of such organizations as the African Union and the Organization of American States, which are more or less comparable to the European Union, even though less well integrated. But there is nothing even remotely comparable or presently contemplated in respect to Asia. Thus, the panel’s designation of a region by the name “Asia and the Pacific” reifies an intellectual and political travesty. Toward the end of this paper I will suggest a division of the world that is much more satisfactory than the one proposed by the panel.

The Security Council as a Caste System:

What I find most objectionable about the panel’s report is its recommendation to retain the special privileges of the P-5, namely permanent membership in the Security Council and possession of the right to veto. Realistically, I recognize that there is not the slightest chance that either of these privileges will be surrendered in the near future; but that should not have precluded a forceful statement opposing their continuation sixty years after the conclusion of World War II. A strong recommendation for their phased elimination, say over a period of fifteen or so years, would have been in order.

In effect, the present Security Council is a political caste system, in which five nations inherit their Brahmanic status, year after year, regardless of the quality of their government, their willingness to use and support the UN, or the rise or decline of their fortunes vis-à-vis all remaining nations. How else can we explain the absurdity of Taiwan’s holding the Chinese seat from 1950 to 1971? The disjuncture between the status of the five anointed powers and all the rest is profound. Seventy-seven of the UN’s 191 Member nations have never served on the Council at all and only eight have served twenty percent or more of their years of eligibility following their accession to the world body. Of these eight, Japan holds the record, having served seventeen years, or 35 % of the total number of years since it joined the UN in 1956.

Rather than eliminating the Council’s caste system, the panel’s report would increase the number of castes from two to three: the original permanent members; the six new permanent members under Plan A or the eight members chosen for four-year renewable terms under Plan B, and all the rest. This is a step backwards, not an advance.

Since all man-made institutions, states included, have a limited life span, the word “permanent,” applied to membership, should find no place in any charter. It needs now to be expunged from the Charter of the UN.

Which Nations to Anoint?

With respect to the specific countries to occupy the new second tier of Security Council seats, there appears to be a high degree of consensus in regard to four countries, even though none is specifically mentioned in the panel's report. Under both Plans A and B, the obvious candidates would be Japan and India in Asia, Germany in Europe, and Brazil in the Americas. The two choices in Africa, however, are problematic. There is, in fact, not a single African nation whose claim to one of the continent's two permanent seats under Plan A or two four-year renewable seats under Plan B cannot be reasonably challenged. The three leading contenders are Nigeria, by virtue of its large population and substantial contribution of troops to UN peacekeeping missions; South Africa, because of its recent conversion to democracy and relative economic strength; and Egypt, because it is the most populous member of the Arab League. But there is no guarantee that Nigeria, a state plagued by frequent authoritarian rule, profound ethnic discord and chronic civil unrest, will endure well into the present century. Egypt also suffers from a severe democratic deficit; moreover, eleven of the Arab League's twenty member states happen to lie in Asia. South Africa's population is little more than a third that of Nigeria and substantially less than Egypt's. Filling out a roster of six states to represent Africa effectively will not be easy. And, as past experience suggests, many African states are so weak that their votes – like those of small and poor states elsewhere in the world – might be compromised by coercion and/or bribery from the major powers. In any event, even when they do stand firm, their wishes are likely to be nullified by a P-5 veto.

I have already suggested the under-representation of Asia in both Plan A and Plan B. In addition to Japan and India, at least eight other Asian nations, could – on the basis of their population, economic strength, and/or contributions of soldiers to UN peacekeeping missions – advance claims to representation that are at least as compelling as those for the countries cited in Africa. Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous nation, for example, has almost twice as many people as Nigeria; and the gross national product of democratically-ruled South Korea is roughly three times that of South Africa. So, what is one to say to an Indonesian or South Korean diplomat pressing his country's case for Security Council membership? "Sorry, old chap, but you're in the wrong continent."

Anointing a handful of significant countries with a special position in the Security Council while shutting out others with comparable or greater claims to be represented has the great drawback of creating a coterie of resentful "wannabes." This should and can be avoided. Let us consider how.

Desiderata for an Effective System of Representation

Here [list on overhead] I indicate a set of nine principles for creating an effective system of representation in the UN Security Council. I will comment briefly on each of them.

- It must be based on clear and valid principles. Those invoked by the high-level panel, though forcefully stated, are not, in my view, sufficiently clear in practice.
- It must be objectively determined. Instead, the panel's recommendations are ad hoc.
- It must apply uniformly to all members. The panel applies different standards of eligibility from one region to another.

- The number of seats should be large enough to be representative, yet small enough to maintain efficiency. Twenty-four seats, as suggested by the panel, are too many.
- It must be flexible, that is, adjustable in light of demographic, economic and other changes. Retaining permanent membership constitutes a bar to flexibility.
- It must be nuanced, such that a small change in one factor determining membership will not result in a large change in voting power. This desideratum is a bit tricky and can be understood only in the context of a system of objectively determined national weights, as in the scenarios presented in my two cited works.
- It must be “realistic,” by which I mean that the distribution of voting power in the Security Council must have a reasonably close relationship to the distribution of power outside the arena of the UN itself. I’ve demonstrated that this is not the case with regard to the four regions suggested in the panel’s report.
- Representation must be maximally inclusive. The panel’s recommendations are an improvement over the present dispensation, but not yet good enough. I will shortly demonstrate that universal or near-universal representation is achievable.
- The factors determining voting strength in the Security Council should, ideally, be organically related to those used for weighted voting in the General Assembly. This point is not easy to grasp on first hearing; so, I must again refer you to my monograph in which the idea is fully developed.

Alternatives to the Panel’s Recommendations:

Let me now briefly present several hypothetical scenarios of Security Council representation that conform to the desiderata just noted. It is impossible to develop them adequately within my available time; but you will find a full exposition in my two cited works.

Here (figure six) is a scenario in which entitlement to a Council seat is predicated on a system of national weights based on a simple mathematical formula that takes into account population, contributions to the UN budget, and a mathematical constant reflecting the sovereign equality of nations. Every nation would have a weight expressed as a percentage of the total for all UN members. Four nations – the United States, China, Japan and India – with weights exceeding a specified threshold, 4%, would be entitled individually to a Council seat. Additionally, blocs of like-minded nations whose collective weights exceeded the same 4% threshold would be entitled to a bloc seat. The total number of seats would be set at eighteen and the occupant of at least one of those seats would be chosen at large by the General Assembly from among the non-bloc group of states.

Since Russia, France and the United Kingdom would not individually qualify for seats under the proposal just presented, and would therefore, presumably, oppose its adoption, I offer here a variant on the preceding proposal (figure seven) in which the special

privileged position of those three powers would be retained for a transitional period of fifteen years. After that time they would have to live under the same objective rules as would be applied to the rest of the world.

In both the foregoing scenarios all seat holders would cast equal unit votes even though the national weights qualifying them for their seats would vary considerably, as indicated by the size of the circles representing them on the maps.

A rather different – and somewhat more radical – approach (figure eight), in which a weighted vote would be given to each of twelve world regions, may also be considered. Here I suggest a division of the world (figure eight) that would make much more sense than the panel's quadripartite proposal. The regions depicted are remarkably coherent. As in the previous two proposals, a mathematical formula would determine regional weights. In this case, the formula would be based on population, contributions to the UN budget and a regional, rather than a national, constant, on the assumption that the global perspective of each of the regions designated would be equally worthy of recognition. Four of the twelve regions would be comprised of but a single nation, the same four – the United States, China, Japan, and India – that passed a specified threshold, as in our first scenario; but in this case the threshold would be 5%. The other eight regions, in alphabetical order, would be Africa South of the Sahara, all of whose members are in the African Union; the Arab League; East Asia, most of whose members are in ASEAN; Europe, most of whose members are already in or are expected soon to join the European Union; Latin America and the Caribbean, all of whose members are in the OAS; Russia and Neighboring Republics, all in the Commonwealth of Independent States; the non-Arab Islamic states of West Asia, all of whom share a common faith; and, finally, what I have called the Westminster League, comprising the English-speaking Commonwealth democracies of Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

A variant on the preceding scenario (figure nine) that is somewhat more complicated, but nevertheless workable, would permit nations to opt for membership in two regions. In this scenario, the nine African members of the Arab League, all of which are simultaneously members of the African Union, could choose also to form part of the African region; while the eleven Asian members could also form part of the West Asian region; Turkey could opt to be simultaneously a member of Europe and West Asia; the United Kingdom and Ireland could be in both Europe and the Westminster League; and so forth.

You will, I am sure, have many doubts and questions about how my four hypothetical scenarios would work in practice. I don't expect you to take it on faith that they could. Rather, I invite you to study my proposals at your leisure in the belief that most, if not all, of your questions will thereby be answered. Should that not be the case, I invite correspondence from you and will try my best to respond.

Conclusion:

It would be naïve of me to suppose that my proposals have much chance of adoption in the coming few years. Not because they lack logic and practicability. Rather, it is because of the tremendous power of institutional inertia and the reluctance of those who believe they benefit from the status quo to change it in the interest of the common good. It is never easy to depart from a well-established paradigm – in this case a UN rooted exclusively in

the Westphalian state system – even if that system is shown to be often dysfunctional and obsolescent. To their credit, however, the members of the High-level Panel recognized that their recommendations were “not to be regarded as permanent or unchallengeable.” Consequently, they recommended that there should be “a review of the composition of the Security Council in 2020.” With that target date in mind, though preferably sooner, I offer a bit of original thinking in hopes of fostering new discussion of what is now needed and of enriching the political debate. But logic alone will not carry the day. Skillful and patient diplomacy, spurred and sustained by pressure from concerned NGOs and a widespread grassroots demand for global justice, will also be needed.

WORKS CITED

High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, New York: United Nations General Assembly, 2004

Schwartzberg, Joseph E., “Regional Representation as a Basis for Security Council Reform,” unpublished essay.

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Figure 1. Seats and Number of States, by Major World Regions, in an Expanded Security Council as per High-level Panel Proposal

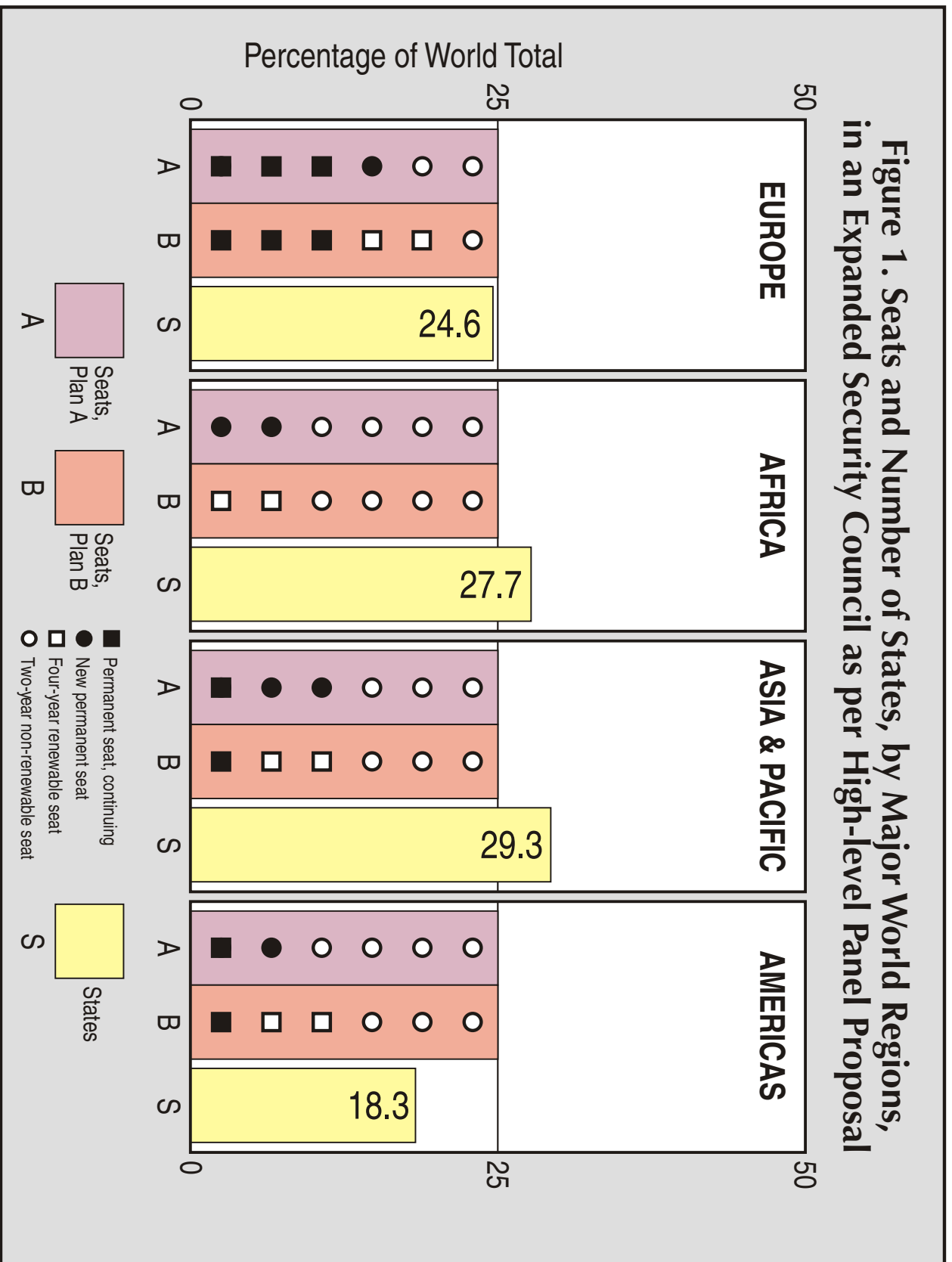


Figure 2. Population of Selected States

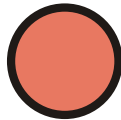
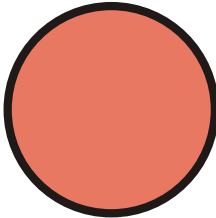
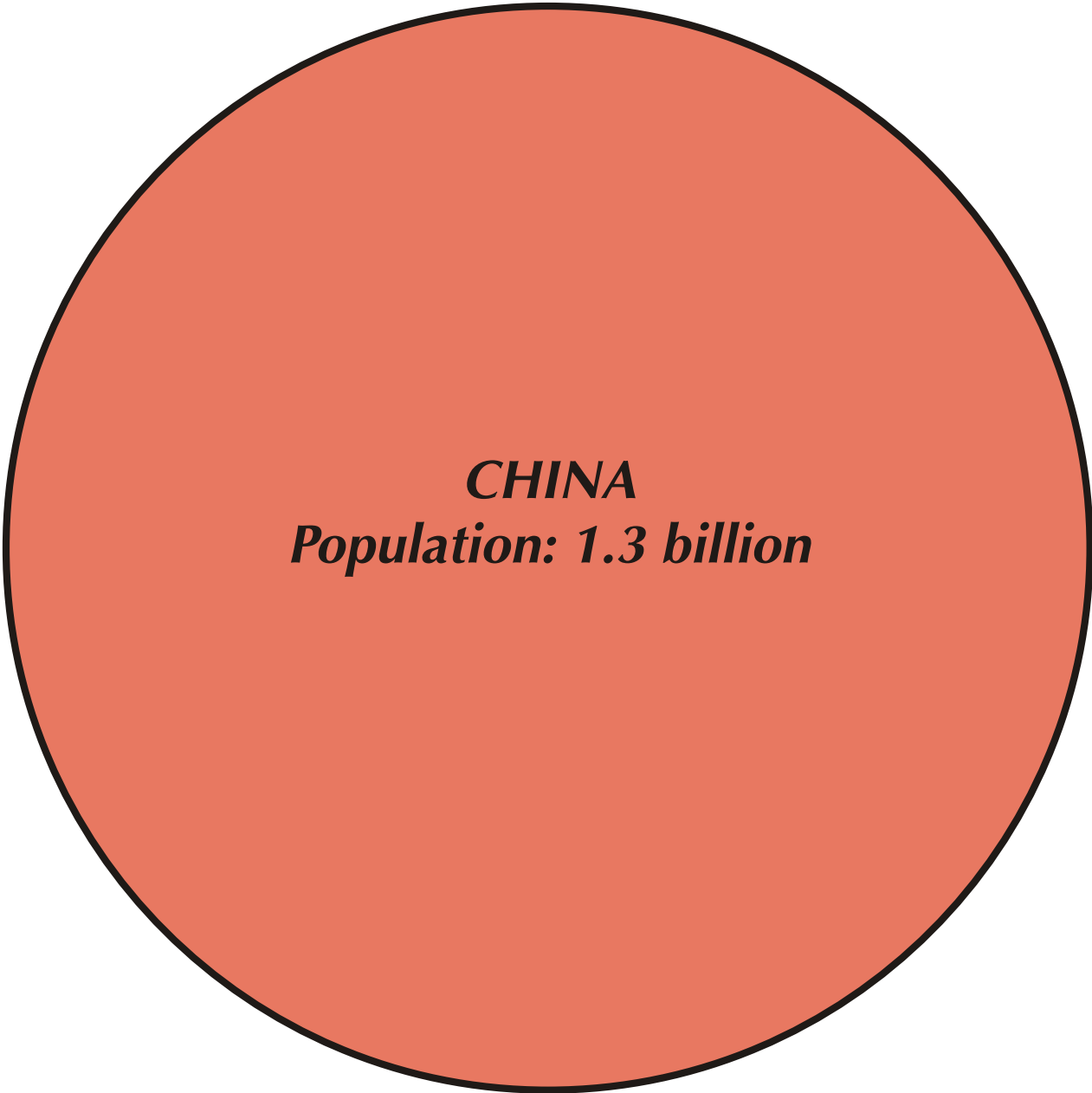
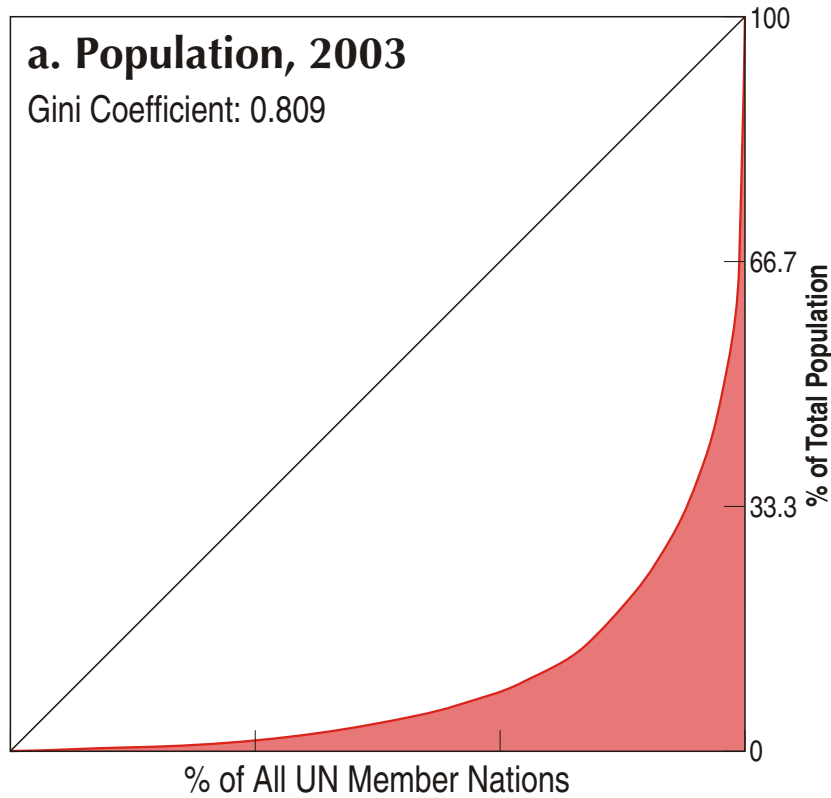
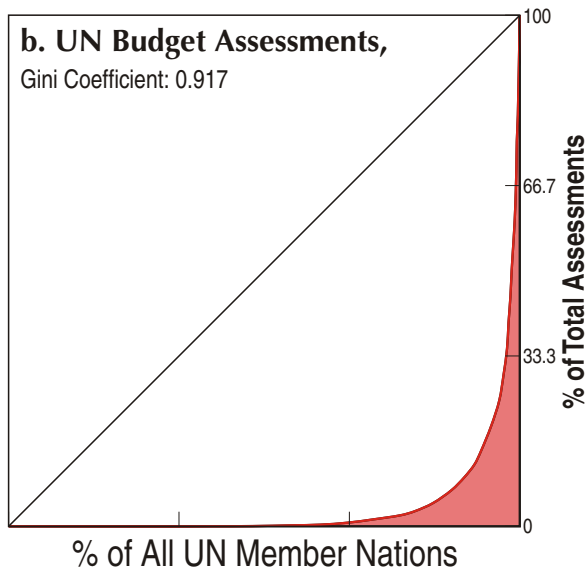


Figure 3. Degrees of Inequality among UN Member Nations in Respect to Population, UN Budget Assessments and Gross National Product



The lowest 96 nations account for 3.4% of the total world population.



The lowest 96 nations account for 0.3% of all contributions.



The lowest 96 nations account for 0.7% of the gross world product.

Figure 4. Shares of Major World regions in terms of Proposed Seats in an Expanded Security Council and Other Key Variables*

