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Posted By [Colum Lynch](#) ■ Friday, October 19, 2012 - 10:16 AM ■ [+](#) [Share](#)

The U.N. Security Council is about to get a little more friendly to the United States -- or at least easier to deal with.

Five new rotating council members elected on Wednesday by the U.N. General Assembly include four close American allies -- Australia, Luxembourg, Rwanda, and South Korea -- that are expected to vote alongside Washington on most of the council's key security matters, from Syria to Iran to North Korea. Completing the line up is Argentina, which may prove to be most resistant to American aims. Each nation will serve a two-year term beginning in January 2013.

The council's new composition marks a departure from recent years, when emerging powers like Brazil, India, Turkey, and South Africa -- eager to prove they had the stuff to become permanent members of the Security Council -- had sought to assert their influence as a counterweight to U.S. power at the United Nations. India and South Africa are set to step down from the council at the end of the year; Turkey left the council at the end of 2010, and Brazil departed at the end of 2011.

"This means the council will be more accommodating," said **Jeffrey Laurenti**, a U.N. specialist at the Century Foundation. "This is a major plus for American diplomacy. They won't have the headache of having to court big players, like the IBSA [India, Brazil, and South Africa] who are not always in your pocket."

The big power divisions between the council's Western powers -- the United States, Britain, and France -- and China and Russia will remain in place, however, limiting the prospects of movement on Syria or Iran. But the pro-Western tilt of the new slate, including middle powers like Australia and South Korea, is likely to lead to a more collaborative approach with the United States.

"This is a very different dynamic; these are both G-20 members, and they are both core U.S. allies," said **Bruce Jones**, director of New York University Center on International Cooperation. "This is an important opportunity for that older mode of Western middle powers to make the case that their form of engagement is still relevant."

Jones said that the departing crop of aspirants to global leadership, including Brazil, India, and Turkey, have been unable to drive the policy agenda on the U.N. Security Council, where they have been routinely outmaneuvered or overruled by the council's five permanent members, Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States.

For instance, Brazil, India, and South Africa joined forces last year to **dilute** efforts by the United States and its European partners to apply tough sanctions on Syrian President **Bashar al-Assad**. And Brazil and Turkey had sought to carve out a mediation role for themselves between the U.N. Security Council and Iran over its nuclear program.

But the permanent five, viewing a challenge to the primacy of their diplomatic role in Iran, shot down



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Longtime *Washington Post* correspondent Colum Lynch reports on all things United Nations for *Turtle Bay*.

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the initiative. Brazil, India, and South Africa, meanwhile, eventually acquiesced to Western pressure to back a tougher line against Syria.

Some of the new members have already begun to identify projects they are likely to pursue in the council during their two-year tenure. For instance, Australia is weighing whether to focus its attention on modernizing the U.N. approach to peacekeeping. Luxembourg is planning to promote U.N. peace-building efforts and Argentina has its eye on raising attention to the plight of children in armed conflict.

But there is another trend that could prove more vexing: The current crop of rotating council members are likely to be more entangled in conflicts of interest than was the previous slate. Argentina signaled this week that it may use its position to press its case for a dialogue with Britain on the future of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands. South Korea will participate in addressing the nuclear standoff with its northern neighbor, North Korea. (And Korean diplomats' relations with their former boss, U.N. Secretary General **Ban Ki-moon**, will attract scrutiny). And other hold-over members have issues of their own. Azerbaijan has interests in the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabagh; Morocco in Western Sahara; and Pakistan in Afghanistan.

Rwanda is proving to be the most interesting -- and controversial -- of the new members. Rwanda, which ran unopposed for the African seat, last served in the Security Council from 1993 to 1994, at the height of the Rwandan genocide. But its seat was held by a representative of a government responsible for carrying out the mass slaughter in Rwanda.

Today, Rwanda is currently led by President **Paul Kagame**, a former rebel commander who drove the former regime from power, and has since led the country through a remarkable economic growth that has placed Rwanda in line. But the government has faced criticism for suppressing political freedom at home and committing human rights abuses as part of a campaign to stem the return of Rwanda's former rulers.

"The contrast could not be sharper between that previous tenure -- when a genocidal government occupied a prized Security Council seat as its agents waged genocide back home -- and the Rwanda of today: a nation of peace, unity, progress and optimism," said Rwanda's Foreign Minister **Louise Mushikiwabo**.

"Working with fellow members, Rwanda will draw on its experience to fight for the robust implementation of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine that demands that the world takes notice -- and action -- when innocent civilians face the threat of atrocities at the hands of their governments, with the understanding that situations have specificities that need to be taken into account."

But while Mushikiwabo celebrated the country's achievement in the Security Council race, her government has come under criticism for alleged military misconduct in neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo.

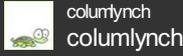
Earlier this week, the U.N. Group of Experts released a report accusing Rwanda, along with help from Uganda, of **sponsoring and commanding a military mutiny**, known as M23, in eastern Congo, violating a U.N. arms embargo. Just yesterday, France circulated a draft Security Council statement that called for condemning the M23 and its foreign backers, a veiled reference to Rwanda and Uganda.

"After blatantly violating the Security Council's arms embargo and undermining the work of the U.N. by propping up the abusive M23 rebels, Rwanda is rewarded with a seat at the table," said **Philippe Boloipon**, the U.N. representative for Human Rights Watch.

"Kigali is now in a position to try to shield its own officials implicated in abuses from U.N. sanctions, which is a flagrant conflict of interest."

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