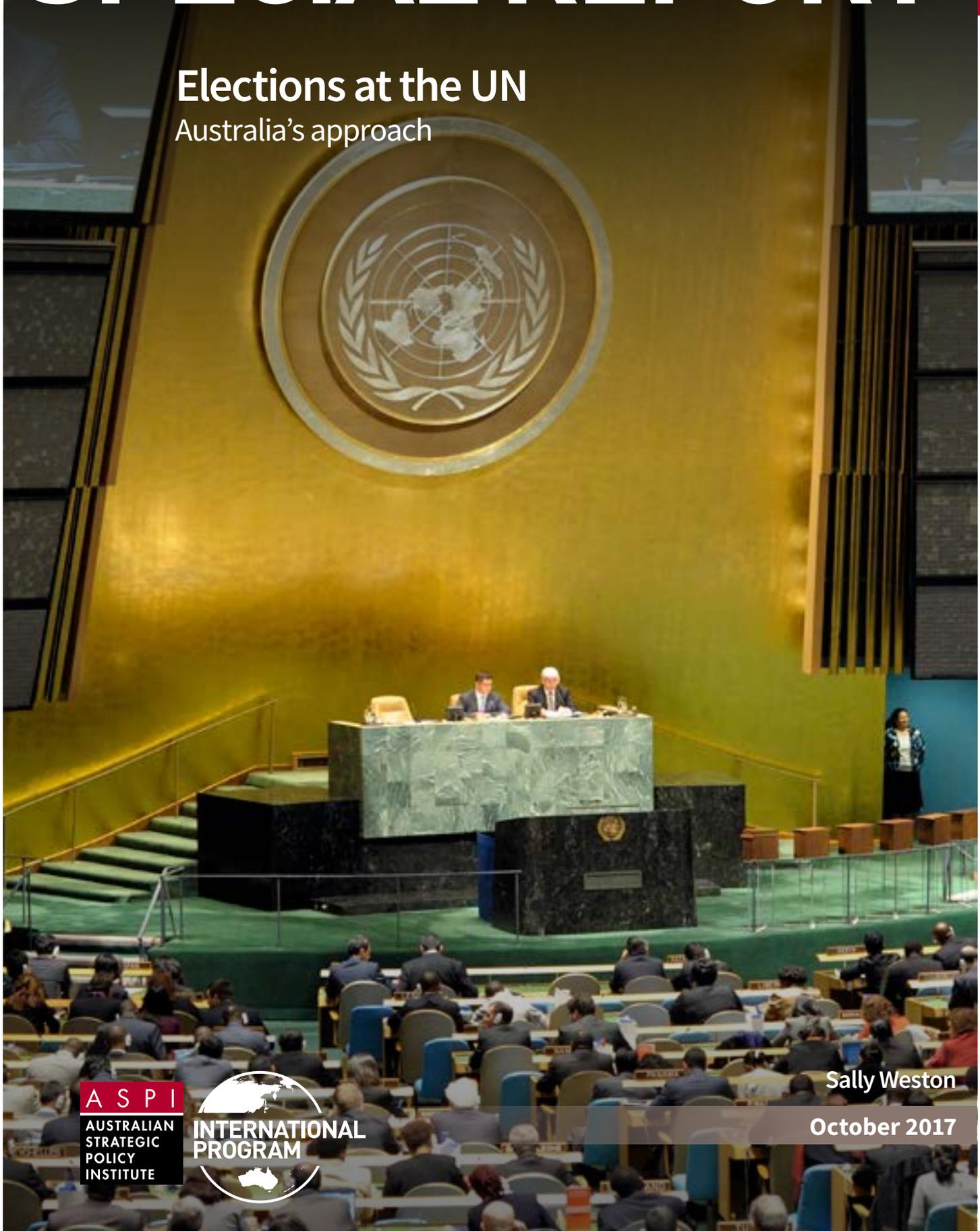


SPECIAL REPORT

ASPI

Elections at the UN Australia's approach



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AUSTRALIAN
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**INTERNATIONAL
PROGRAM**

Sally Weston

October 2017

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Cover image: The UN General Assembly Hall, as Vuk Jeremić (shown on screens), President of the Assembly's sixty-seventh session, presides over the elections involving Australia's candidacy for the Security Council for the 2013-2014 term, 18 October 2012. © UN Photo/Evan Schneider.

Elections at the UN

Australia's approach



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INTRODUCTION

Australia has, until recently, been locked in a tight contest for election to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) for the 2018–2020 term. Australia, together with Spain and France, had nominated for two of the three seats available to its regional group (the Western Europe and Others Group) at elections scheduled in New York on 16 October 2017. Each of the candidates had been campaigning hard around the globe and the election of any of the three candidates was not assured. However, with France’s announcement in July 2017 that it would postpone its candidacy to the 2021–2023 term,¹ it’s now almost guaranteed that Australia and Spain will be elected by the UN member states to the two vacant seats on the council. It appears that France made a frank assessment of its prospects and concluded that it would probably fall short of the numbers required to be elected², particularly as it was the last of the three candidates to nominate. Its postponed candidacy is a reflection of how hard these races are. It also demonstrates how important these contests are for candidates. They will withdraw their candidacies if they assess that there is a high prospect of loss rather than risk international embarrassment and diminished international influence.

If Australia wins the seat, that will be the first time that we’ll serve on the HRC. It’s a significant candidacy—we have the opportunity to make a valuable contribution to the work of the pre-eminent inter-governmental body overseeing the protection and promotion of global human rights and, in doing so, also promote our own interests and build influence as a global player. These are outcomes that membership in UN inter-governmental bodies can achieve. The candidacy therefore presents a timely opportunity to consider the value of serving on UN inter-governmental bodies and Australia’s rationale and approach in putting itself forward as a candidate on a regular basis.

While the UN General Assembly is represented by all 193 member states, most UN inter-governmental bodies have elections to determine which countries or individual from the UN membership will serve for a set term. Elections convened at the UN are shrouded in mystery for outsiders. Most wouldn’t be aware of the number of significant elections that take place, the breadth of the subject matter of those elections, or the campaign strategies used by member states to promote their candidacies. Many member states identify electoral representation across the UN as a priority and frequently nominate candidacies for election. While many candidates are elected uncontested, most UN candidacies involve competition. Member states invest resources to promote their candidacies effectively. They do so not just out of a benevolent interest in contributing to multilateral processes, but in recognition that representation assists them to shape policy outcomes in their national interests, increases their standing and influence and projects power. It is a significant demonstration of a commitment to the rules-based global order. Serious global players have profile at the UN.

Throughout the UN’s seventy-two year history, Australia has been an influential and engaged actor. Due to our geographic location, size and approach to diplomacy, we’ve often been able to bridge fractious issues. This was demonstrated during Australia’s recent term on the UN Security Council, where Australia took the pen (the lead) with Luxembourg and Jordan on initiatives to address the Syrian humanitarian crisis—something rarely done by a non-permanent member of the council.

Notwithstanding this, some question the benefits of member states nominating for UN positions at all. In the Australian context, a number of media commentators, members of the Australian public and politicians questioned Australia's candidacy for election to the UN Security Council for the 2013–2014 term. Some suggested it was merely a vanity project, while others dismissed the candidacy as a poor use of resources or a misguided effort to contribute to an undeserving UN with alleged deep flaws and ineffectiveness.³ Similarly, there's scepticism about Australia's current HRC bid, again based mainly on reservations about the UN's worth. Much of the criticism reveals a deep misconception of the UN and its work, the benefits from Australia serving on important bodies, such as the Security Council and HRC, and, more broadly, Australia's place in the global order. There is a tendency in Australia to take the UN and multilateralism for granted. Australia's success on the Security Council wasn't often widely understood back in Australia, due to limited public diplomacy and consequently, poor media coverage. As a consequence, the value of our UN electoral engagement is underestimated.

This paper examines the electoral process to serve on UN organs and bodies. It explores the opportunities for representation and what it often takes to ensure that candidacies are successful in an inherently competitive field. It also examines the benefits of Australian representation in UN bodies and organs and provides recommendations for Australia to sustain its UN engagement by strategically presenting candidacies to the UN membership—not only in recognition of the contribution that our expertise can offer to the international community, but as an important projection of our influence in international forums. It's hoped that this subject of Australia's strategy for UN candidacies is considered in Australia's forthcoming Foreign Policy White Paper (the first since 2003).

UN ELECTIONS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR INFLUENCE

Many elections take place in the UN to elect member states to serve on principal UN organs and bodies and to elect experts to UN subsidiary bodies and treaty bodies. In the former case, member states represent themselves. In the latter case, member states' nationals are put forward to serve in an individual expert capacity, but the member states enjoy the prestige of their nationals' association with the UN bodies and often benefit from the knowledge gained by the experts from their service.

Table 1: Snapshot of the main UN bodies that involve elections

UN body	Members	Description	Established by
Security Council	5 Permanent (China, France, Russia, UK and USA) & 10 non-permanent	Responsible for maintenance of international peace and security.	UN Charter: Chapter V (articles 23–32)
Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)	54 members	Coordinates and makes recommendations to the General Assembly on international economic, social, cultural, educational, health and environmental issues.	UN Charter: Chapter IX (articles 55–60) and Chapter X (articles 61–72)
International Court of Justice (ICJ)	15 judges	UN's principal judicial organ. Decides cases submitted to it by States, in accordance with international law, and gives advisory opinions to the General Assembly and Security Council and authorised UN organs and specialised agencies.	UN Charter: Chapter XIV (articles 92–96)
Human Rights Council (HRC)	47 members	Responsible for promoting and protecting human rights and considers and makes recommendations on human rights violations.	General Assembly Resolution 60/251 (2006)
Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)	31 members	Supports countries emerging from conflict.	General Assembly Resolution 60/180 (2005) and Security Council Resolutions 1645 (2005) and 1646 (2005)

The UN Charter established six principal organs of the UN: the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the Secretariat. Of these principal bodies, elections are held for membership of the Security Council, ECOSOC and the ICJ. For the purposes of those elections, each of the five UN regional groups has seats allocated to it in an effort to ensure some degree of equitable geographical representation on the bodies. The regional groups are Africa; the Asia–Pacific; Eastern Europe; Latin America and Caribbean; and Western Europe and Others (WEOG). Australia is a member of WEOG as an 'Other' and therefore typically competes against other states that are also members of WEOG for election to principal UN organs. One would expect Australia to be a member of the Asia–Pacific group, but a

historical quirk meant that, together with Canada and New Zealand, we remained in WEOG after it transitioned from its previous configuration as the British Commonwealth Group, while other states transferred to more obvious geographical groupings.

The most well known UN election of a principal body is the annual election for non-permanent membership of the Security Council, which is held by secret ballot before the UN General Assembly each June in New York.⁴ There's rarely an empty country desk in the General Assembly hall for this vote, given the importance of the Security Council as the paramount body to promote and maintain international peace and security and the commensurate value that member state candidates attach to membership of the council. Member states make sure they turn up and vote. In contested races, candidates have often dedicated years to active campaigning for a coveted seat. Indeed, Australia nominated in 2008 as a candidate for the Security Council's 2013–2014 term, for which elections were held in October 2012. One might consider this to be a lengthy period to campaign, but it was short compared with the length of our competitors' candidacies (Luxembourg nominated in 2001 and Finland in 2002). Candidates' electoral fortunes (whether they succeed at the Security Council elections) are closely observed by other member states in what is akin to a 'blood sport'. A member state candidate's successful campaign is often interpreted as a reflection of its standing and global influence.

The opportunity to serve on the Security Council is limited, given that there are only 10 non-permanent members (that is, elected members) on the council, together with the five permanent members (China, France, Russia, the UK and the US). Australia has served five times since the founding of the UN in 1945 (1946–1947; 1956–1957; 1973–1974; 1985–1986 and 2013–2014). We were unsuccessful at the Security Council elections in 1996, so we were absent from the Council for over 25 years. Most recently, Australia has announced its candidacy to serve on the council again for the 2029–2030 term.⁵

The UN also convenes elections for membership of ECOSOC. This council is the 'principal body for coordination, policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations on economic, social and environmental issues, as well as for the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals.' It's also the 'central mechanism for the activities of the UN system and its specialised agencies and supervises the subsidiary and expert bodies in the economic, social and environmental fields.'⁶ The council's 54 members are elected by the UN General Assembly for overlapping three-year terms. That means that 18 seats are either renewed or newly elected each year according to geographical representation.

Australia is a current member of ECOSOC and has served frequently since the establishment of the council under the UN Charter in 1945. WEOG has an agreed rotation scheme in place in which it presents the same number of candidates as there are available seats. This means that there's currently no competition for ECOSOC seats within WEOG, and candidates will be elected by the General Assembly membership as a formality.

The final principal UN body that is composed by election is the ICJ. The court's role is 'to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by states and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorised UN organs and specialised agencies.'⁷ The UN membership appoints judges to the court. The ICJ is composed of 15 judges, who are elected to nine-year terms of office by the UN General Assembly and the Security Council. Five judges are elected every three years. While there is no formal requirement for geographical distribution of the seats, the court's composition in practice mirrors the Security Council's composition. This means that, in another example of privilege, the five permanent members of the Security Council always have a judge on the court. The distribution of seats is: five seats for WEOG, three for Africa, two for Latin America and the Caribbean, three for Asia-Pacific and two for Eastern Europe (including the five permanent members).⁸ Opportunities for the UN membership to have a national on the court bench are therefore limited.

Member states view election to the ICJ as extremely prestigious. It's highly desirable to be judged by the UN membership to have the requisite high standard of jurist to contribute to the UN's principal judicial forum. One would hope so, given the importance of the court. Australia currently has a judge serving on the bench after Professor James Crawford was elected in 2014 to serve for the 2015–2024 term. Judge Crawford is only the second Australian member of the ICJ, after Sir Percy Spender served from 1958 to 1967.⁹

The UN membership convenes elections for the HRC. The council is a Charter-based body (meaning that the authority to establish the council derived from the UN Charter) and is the principal intergovernmental body within the UN system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of global human rights, and for addressing global human rights violations.¹⁰ The council is composed of 47 member states that are elected by the UN General Assembly in New York through secret ballot for three-year terms; one-third of the members are renewed each year. The HRC is a critical forum for states to shape global human rights norms. There's consequently a level of prestige in being elected to this forum. The HRC was established in 2006 and Australia is yet to serve on it, although we did serve on its predecessor, the UN Commission on Human Rights, which operated from 1947 to 2006.

Another more recent UN body, the Peacebuilding Commission, also depends on elections to constitute its membership. The commission is an intergovernmental advisory body that supports countries emerging from conflict. The commission comprises 31 members. In the enabling resolutions establishing the commission in 2005,¹¹ the UN General Assembly and the Security Council decided that members of the Organizational Committee should serve on the following basis:

- seven members are elected by the General Assembly
- seven members are selected by the Security Council
- seven members are elected by ECOSOC
- five are the top providers of military personnel and civilian police to UN missions
- five are the top providers of assessed contributions to UN budgets and of voluntary contributions to UN funds, programs and agencies, including a standing peacebuilding fund.

Australia served as a member of this body in 2010.¹²

The UN also convenes elections for a raft of treaty bodies in which nationals are nominated by their member state countries to serve as independent experts. A member state is eligible to present the candidacies of nationals where the state is a party to the relevant treaty. Treaties prescribe a number of elections to human rights bodies, including the Committee Against Torture, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Committee on the Rights of the Child, Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Human Rights Committee. There are also a number of elections for treaty bodies relating to law of the sea, including the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. Most recently, Australia has supported the election of Professor Ron McCallum to serve two terms on the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (at elections in 2008 and 2010). Professor McCallum was also elected to serve as chair of the committee. This candidacy was put forward as a reflection of the Australian Government's priority in the policy areas of disability rights.

Elections are held for expert bodies to the General Assembly, including the International Law Commission and the International Civil Service Commission. The UN also hosts elections for the 18 judges that sit on the International Criminal Court (strictly speaking, the court is not a body of the UN, but is related by agreement).

ECOSOC also convenes a number of elections for its subsidiary bodies. Australia nominated Australian national Professor Megan Davis to one such body, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which resulted in her election as an expert member for two terms at elections held in 2010 and 2014. Professor Davis also served as chair of the forum. The forum is a high-level advisory body to ECOSOC, which is mandated to address indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights.¹³ Professor Davis's contribution to the forum resulted in her current appointment as a UN expert with the HRC's Geneva-based Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The above overview demonstrates the high volume of UN elections that take place to constitute important UN inter-governmental organisations. The number of UN elections are too great to identify in this paper exhaustively.¹⁴ Overall, Australia has an impressive range of representation on UN bodies, particularly given the relatively limited opportunities for representation (with 193 member states) and the competitive nature of most positions.

BENEFITS OF REPRESENTATION

Australia should pursue UN candidacies as a means of foreign policy for a number of reasons. Primarily, we should serve in UN elected positions because it's in our direct national interests to do so. We have much to contribute and, consequently, much to gain. Representation gives us a direct opportunity to secure outcomes that meet our strategic national interests. This is demonstrated by a number of key outcomes from Australia's last term on the Security Council, in 2013 and 2014, which included:

- leading the council's response to the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, which resulted in a resolution supporting an impartial international investigation and demanding accountability for the perpetrators
- strengthening the implementation of sanctions through, in particular, chairing the al-Qaeda, Taliban and Iran sanctions committees
- coordinating the council's work on Afghanistan
- pushing for a coordinated international response to the threat of foreign terrorist fighters.¹⁵

Australian leadership of the council's response to the flight MH17 incident is a prominent example. It has been described by Australia's UN Ambassador at the time as a seminal moment in our term on the council.¹⁶ On 17 July 2014, a ground-based missile attack destroyed the airliner over eastern Ukrainian airspace. Two hundred and ninety-eight people were killed in the incident, including 38 Australians. It was a devastating incident that required a decisive response. The Australian Government was quick to announce that it would be pursuing the resolution in the Security Council. Resolution 2166 was agreed only four days after the incident and in the face of Russian opposition, given Russia's support for the Eastern Ukraine rebels who were the likely perpetrators of the attack. Australia's council membership was essential in securing the resolution, particularly in circumstances in which our key allies, the US and the UK, didn't wish to lead on the issue. Our seat at the table gave us leverage to negotiate directly with Security Council members, most particularly Russia, to secure the resolution in politically toxic circumstances. The Crimean conflict had been going on for months and had poisoned the dynamics between the council members such that it had spilled over to jeopardise many council outcomes unrelated to the dispute. The allegations of Russia's involvement in the incident as material supporters of the rebels exacerbated the negotiating environment and compounded the challenge of securing the resolution. Contrast Australia's position with that of the Netherlands, which, despite losing the largest number of nationals in the tragic episode, had to rely on partners (mostly Australia) to advocate its interests because it wasn't a member of the Security Council. Our council membership also allowed us to forge a global response in a region of the world that we had very little influence over in our own right.

Membership in UN forums also strengthens Australia's capacity to shape, maintain and protect global norms. The unique legitimacy of the UN is founded on a rules-based order in which norms regulate how member states relate to each other. Those norms include respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity and the legal framework for the protection of individuals in conflict.¹⁷ Australia needs to be an active participant in protecting those norms, particularly in the light of the current complex global security environment in which the rules-based order is increasingly challenged. Australia's most recent statement in the UN General Debate recognised those challenges, including by identifying the infringing acts of North Korea, terrorism and violent extremism and the use of chemical weapons in Syria.¹⁸ The problem is compounded by the US's retreat at the UN. Australia has pledged to work with

others to protect an international order that ensures that all states can pursue their interests securely and that supports cooperative responses to global challenges.¹⁹ Particularly in the light of the US withdrawal, Australia, together with like-minded states, needs to step into the emerging vacuum rather than leave that space to states with markedly different world views.

Australia's entry into the HRC presents an opportunity to influence the international response to critical human rights situations and uphold fundamental human rights norms. Some commentators have been critical of Australia seeking membership of the HRC, given the council's current composition of a number of states with poor rights records, citing China, Cuba, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela.²⁰ However, this is even more reason for Australia to engage and play a leading role in defending Australia's and like-minded nations' interests, especially in view of the US having flagged its consideration of withdrawing from the council.²¹

A further benefit of Australia serving on UN bodies is the capacity to reinforce relationships with key partners. To be viewed as credible and reliable partners, states need to do the work and do it well. We enhanced our relationship with a number of fellow members of the Security Council during our last term in 2013–2014, most particularly the US and UK. Our membership of the HRC is likely to achieve the same outcomes.

Finally, Australia should serve across UN organisations because that's an important projection of Australian influence. It's notable that each of the G20 countries routinely puts forward major candidacies at the UN. This isn't only a reflection of their interests in shaping outcomes to meet their national interests, but a projection of their global standing and efforts to exercise influence. Australia has a longstanding history of engagement with the UN. We're a founding member, an active participant in UN institutions for over 70 years, the 12th largest contributor to its regular budget and 11th largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget. Australia is also a G20 member, has the world's 13th largest economy and maintains an impressive military. It would be curious if we didn't seek to regularly serve across the UN. Other member states certainly expect us to.

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN CAMPAIGNS: STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES

Some people mistakenly consider that UN elections are all about electioneering; even to the extent that member states engage in backroom deal-making without any substance to their campaigns and with no bona fide credentials. However, it's also incorrect to suggest that successful candidacies are based solely on the merits of the candidate. Most successful campaigns in contests need to have both meritorious candidates backed by strong campaigns. Many successful campaigns for UN principal bodies are the products of years of work that have employed multifaceted strategies to secure election. Member states have clearly assessed that high-level representation in the UN system is worth this considerable investment.

What are some of the common campaign techniques employed by successful candidates? At the outset, most candidates ordinarily devise strategies to win the support of each member state (or, in treaty body elections, states that are parties to the relevant treaty). This means identifying how best to secure support from all the relevant member states. In the case of elections for principal bodies, each member state strategy should be nuanced and offer a frank assessment of the nature of the bilateral relationship, including by identifying existing instances of cooperation, the target state's priorities, possible scope for cooperation and possible irritants to the relationship. Some states are obvious allies and will quickly confirm their support, whereas for others the bilateral relationship is thin, offering no obvious means of cooperation. With some, the relationship is in some respects antagonistic, and the prospects of securing support are challenging. Because relationships are fluid, these assessments are constantly under review. Member state strategies are an important input to the overriding campaign.

Candidate countries seek to structure a dedicated campaign team to most effectively construct and implement the campaign strategy. Australia had a taskforce operating out of Canberra to centralise its Security Council campaign by tasking diplomatic posts. As one would expect, the taskforce liaised particularly closely with the campaign team in New York to calibrate and implement key campaign activities. Typically, the core election teams in New York for candidate countries comprise at least the Permanent Representative, Deputy Permanent Representative, senior campaign manager, elections officer and communications specialist.

The main locus for campaigning is in New York, as that's where the elections take place, at UN Headquarters, even for UN bodies located in other cities. This includes the imminent elections for the HRC. However, Geneva is a particularly important venue for campaigning for the HRC, given that the council is based there. Candidates will invest considerable time in both cities.

Still, the big campaigns are necessarily global in nature and will also feature intensive lobbying in the capitals of the target states and in the candidate's capital, if the target state has a diplomatic presence there, as well as in the margins of key multilateral meetings. Multilateral meetings of high-level representatives offer an efficient means to interact with key decision-makers. Some of the meetings in which campaigning takes place include the UN Leaders Week in New York, the African Union Summit and the Non-Aligned Movement Summit.

High-level political engagement is fundamental to a campaign. Its absence suggests that the candidate country doesn't see the bid as important. Without it, lobbying directly with counterparts—often the decision-maker who will convey instructions to their ambassador in New York on the member state's voting position—is precluded. Typically, this means lobbying the head of the state or the government (the president or prime minister) and the foreign minister. In the case of Australia's Security Council bid, prime ministers Rudd and Gillard and foreign ministers Smith, Rudd and Carr lobbied for support with their counterparts. Australia's current Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, has been conspicuous in her intensive lobbying for Australia's HRC candidacy. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has described Ms Bishop as the 'spearhead' and 'point person' for the campaign and noted that she has raised our candidacy in multilateral, regional and bilateral contexts for several years.²² Ms Bishop hosted high-profile events to promote the campaign in Canberra and New York in May 2017 and recently embarked on extensive overseas travel in which she pressed the candidacy with counterparts prior to France's withdrawal of its candidacy. Prime Minister Turnbull referenced the candidacy in his speech at the UN Leaders Week in 2016.²³ Most recently, the Foreign Minister prosecuted the campaign at the UN in September in Leaders Week, including in her speech in the General Debate.²⁴ While France's withdrawal from the race means Australia is almost guaranteed election to the HRC, we'll still need to ensure that member states turn up to the General Assembly on 16 October to vote and give us the majority we require.

Australia's Minister for International Development and the Pacific, Senator Fierravanti-Wells, has also been deployed to raise the candidacy in multilateral and bilateral meetings, including making a pitch for Australia's credentials at the High Level Segment of the Council in Geneva in February 2017.²⁵ Rounding out Australia's high-level political engagement, the Trade Minister, the Minister for Justice and the Minister for Defence have also lobbied for Australia's candidacy during the course of their work.²⁶

Candidate countries often appoint special envoys to supplement high-level ministerial lobbying. Envoys act as a force multiplier by undertaking extensive travel to capitals of target countries when the ministers can't. They must be suitably senior themselves for heads of state or government to grant them an audience and must be regarded as sufficiently influential to justify the meeting. In the case of Australia's HRC campaign, the Australian Government appointed former Minister for Immigration and Attorney-General, Philip Ruddock, as Australia's first envoy on human rights to actively promote Australia's candidacy. Mr Ruddock has travelled widely in this role, including to Central America, East Africa, Scandinavia and the Caribbean. The government has also appointed a second envoy, Bill Fisher, to campaign in French-speaking countries. He's an experienced former Australian ambassador who is fluent in French and experienced in large-scale UN candidacies, having also acted as an envoy to Francophone countries for Australia's Security Council candidacy. The envoys' appointments also seek to ameliorate the campaign challenge of Australia's limited diplomatic network—Australia has fewer than 120 posts, compared with France's 267 missions and Spain's 212.²⁷ This has placed us at a disadvantage in lobbying target countries.

Candidates typically seek to secure a 'yes' for support not only from the relevant high-level decision-maker (the head of state or the government) but also from the permanent representative (the ambassador) of the same country in New York. It's the permanent representative who is likely to be casting the vote in the secret ballot, so it's critical that voting instructions be confirmed in New York. In some instances, the permanent representative makes the decision on support. Accordingly, candidate countries need a personable permanent representative in New York who is capable of effectively crafting and implementing a campaign strategy, including undertaking extensive outreach and lobbying in support of the campaign. In this regard, Ambassador Gary Quinlan was unrelenting in his prosecution of Australia's Security Council campaign during his posting to New York, following the important work of his predecessor, Ambassador Robert Hill, in the beginning of the campaign. Similarly, the current Australian Ambassador, Gillian Bird, has been dedicated in her lobbying efforts for Australia's HRC bid.

However, campaigns aren't just about lobbying. They need to have a degree of substance to succeed. While member states invariably decide to support candidates for different reasons, many will assess the candidate's credentials during their deliberations and need to be satisfied that the candidate is capable of doing the job. For Australia's Security Council bid, we emphasised our longstanding contribution to the UN's work to maintain international peace and security. We drew attention to our contribution of more than 65,000 personnel to more than

50 UN and other multilateral peace and security operations since 1947. We recalled our historic ties with the UN, including holding the first Presidency of the Security Council in 1946 and providing the first military personnel as peacekeepers under UN auspices a year later, to Indonesia.²⁸

Australia also reiterated its more contemporary record of service to the work of the UN for peace and security, including having taken the leading role in the UN-mandated mission in Timor-Leste and the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, which operated with the UN's endorsement, together with having been the largest non-NATO contributor to the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.²⁹

Candidates ensure that they emphasise their UN contributions in all their campaign outreach. In some cases, this may be overstretched. For example, the reality is that Australia's peacekeeping contributions have declined in the past 15 years. Currently, we aren't among the top 80 countries that contribute troops and police to UN peacekeeping. Only three G20 countries deploy fewer UN peacekeepers than Australia: Japan, Mexico and Saudi Arabia, the last of which makes no contribution. This is likely to be a challenge when we present for future UN candidacies, such as a seat on the Security Council.³⁰

When considering whether to support a candidate country, a member state will also often weigh up the state of its bilateral relationship with that country. It may be that the two countries have a strong relationship and like-minded outlook and will typically support each others' candidacies; or they may have a developing relationship with scope for further cooperation that warrants an assessment to support the candidate; or it may be that there's either a baseline relationship or even an acrimonious relationship that rules out support. For large-scale campaigns (most particularly for the Security Council or HRC), each member state will be approached with a request for support regardless of the nature of the relationship.

A candidate country will also seek to communicate a narrative behind its candidacy to convey a sense of its character, which is consistent with most elections that seek to appeal to the electorate by personalising the candidate. Messaging is key. Foreign Minister Bishop has sought to leverage the positive reception of Australia's recent Security Council membership by describing Australia's intended approach to the HRC as a continuation of that work.³¹ Our campaign has depicted Australia as essentially a Pacific country to not only suggest the unique contribution that Australia would make to the council (no Pacific country has previously served), but to also set us apart from our European competitors.³² We've also promoted our diversity, which is an appealing quality to the UN membership, as a key characteristic in our campaign outreach.³³

Consistent with this theme, the Australian Government has highlighted its record on immigration. The Foreign Minister has stated that we've welcomed more than 7 million migrants, including 800,000 refugees, into our current population of 24 million people. Ms Bishop asserts that 'Australia welcomes to its shores people from every nation' and 'it's our inclusiveness that makes Australia such an appealing choice for so many people.'³⁴ Some would challenge this representation of accessibility, given the current controversy over Australia's policy of offshore detention of asylum seekers. The Australian Government has regularly sought to defend its policy as consistent with its credentials for the HRC.³⁵

Member states also expect to be informed of a candidate country's 'policies' or priorities should its candidacy be successful. Australia has presented its priorities for the HRC and underlined our credentials under each of five pillars:

Should we be elected, we commit to playing a constructive role across the Council's work—particularly in five key areas where we believe that Australia has a valuable contribution, particular expertise, a unique experience to offer to the world:

- the rights of indigenous people is the first pillar
- strong national human rights institutions
- good governance
- freedom of expression
- gender equality and gender empowerment.

These are just five areas where Australia will support human rights in practical and sensible ways.³⁶

As part of its communications strategy, a candidate will employ public diplomacy to appeal to member states and seek to educate their constituents about the candidate's identity and ideals. In Australia's case, a recent example was the government inviting the Bangarra Dance Theatre to Geneva in support of our bid.³⁷ Receptions, exhibitions and concerts are a feature of UN campaigns.

Candidates commonly pursue further tactics. A candidate will seek to cultivate broad support from UN constituencies. In the case of Australia, we typically tap into our shared historical ties by coordinating with Commonwealth countries to secure their support. There are 52 Commonwealth countries in the UN membership, and many are extremely proud of their historical roots and identify a strong commonality with fellow Commonwealth countries. This was apparent in Australia's campaign for the Security Council's 2013–14 term. Similarly, France would have sought to leverage its ties with Francophone countries (there are 74 in the UN) to secure their support. Endorsements from UN regional blocs are also helpful to a candidate—not only because this usually means that members of the bloc will support the candidacy, but because it often generates a momentum that prompts other member states to commit their support. Australia won the early support of our Pacific neighbours by receiving an endorsement from the Pacific Islands Forum for our Security Council candidacy. Our competitors, Luxembourg and Finland, invested significant time in the Pacific region, hoping to also receive an endorsement. We also received the coveted endorsement of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) for our Security Council candidacy prior to the vote in October 2012. In recognition of CARICOM's importance, Foreign Minister Bishop travelled to the regional meeting of heads of government of Caribbean countries in Grenada in July 2017 to lobby for the 14 available votes and endorsement of the group.

Candidates seek, where possible, to formalise mutual support arrangements ('reciprocals') with member states, which involves agreeing to support each other's candidacies of similar weight. As an example, a member state may commit to supporting a candidate's bid for the Security Council in return for the candidate supporting the member state's own Security Council bid for a future term. The agreements are typically made in writing and, while not all are honoured (it's a secret ballot, after all), the formality of the agreement gives the candidate some reassurance that it will be carried out. While some commentators miscast these reciprocal support arrangements as a shady aspect of a campaign, member states of good standing conclude reciprocals only for candidacies that they would have supported regardless of a support arrangement.

Finally, organised candidates seek to cover as many contingencies as possible at the vote. Even the most organised and meritorious candidates are deeply aware of the unpredictable nature of UN elections, especially given that they take place by secret ballot. Many candidates have been blindsided in elections by the significant shortfall between commitments of support and actual votes (the 'discount' factor). Among recent Security Council elections, this was Iceland's experience in 2008, Canada's in 2010, Hungary's in 2011, Finland's in 2012 and Turkey's in 2014 (see box). Australia was elected to the council in 2012 because its commitments of votes largely held, with only a small discount factor.³⁸

Unpredictable elections

Clearly, candidates wish to be elected in the first rounds of voting by securing the necessary majority vote, but they need to be prepared for multiple rounds of voting. Australia avoided protracted voting in the 2012 Security Council election by being elected after the first round with 140 votes (129 votes was the minimum majority), while its competitors fell short and were required to proceed to a second round run-off. Luxembourg ultimately defeated Finland for the last WEOG seat.

Candidates are conscious that elections become increasingly unpredictable as they advance through rounds of voting. Some member states consider that their commitment of support applies only for the first and possibly the second round before some discretion arises. Some find themselves in the difficult position of having to reconcile their commitments of support for two candidates (remember that, in the case of WEOG, there are always two available seats in Security Council elections) because they can only vote for one of the two candidates in a run-off.

And there's a phenomenon involving fatigue, in which some member states will wish to dispense with an election that's excessively long and, when one candidate shifts ahead in support (but without the requisite support), will throw their support behind the candidate with more momentum to bring the election to a close. The contest between Venezuela and Guatemala in 2006 took place over 47 rounds of voting before Panama was elected as a compromise candidate. More recently, the Eastern European Group fielded three candidates for one seat in the Security Council elections in 2011. While Hungary, with the least votes, was eliminated after the first round, Slovenia and Azerbaijan became locked in a protracted contest that saw Azerbaijan marginally ahead before Slovenia acknowledged the writing on the wall and withdrew its candidacy in favour of Azerbaijan. That contest involved 17 rounds over two days of voting (including a weekend intervention that saw extensive global lobbying by each of the candidates).

Some candidates have taken lessons from this experience and have devised a second and subsequent round strategy as a contingency at their election. This may involve speaking on the floor between rounds to member states to ensure that they stick with the candidate through any subsequent rounds and talking with those that had previously been unable to support the candidate in the hope that their other commitments have been satisfied and they are then free to shift support. The fluidity of UN elections can be unnerving for candidates. A highly unusual outcome of the Security Council elections in 2016 was that the WEOG candidates (Italy and the Netherlands) agreed to split the second seat (Sweden had already been elected to the first WEOG seat). The decision was a pragmatic one, as it was apparent after five rounds of voting that the election was deadlocked and continuing the vote would risk a candidate losing to its competitor or an alternative compromise candidate. The General Assembly ultimately approved the arrangement to permit Italy to serve on the Council in 2017 and the Netherlands to take over membership in 2018.

Many of the strategies identified above are applied (with varying degrees of success) by member states involved in large-scale campaigns for election to principal or charter UN bodies. Some are particularly methodical in their application, including Brazil, Germany, India and Japan. It's no accident that those particular states boast strong success rates in their candidacies. Known as the G4 (Group of Four), they have banded together to promote their aspirations for permanent membership of the Security Council. Their strategy is to serve frequently on the council to demonstrate their credentials and build their influence in order to achieve their overarching ambitions of permanent membership. Electoral success in the UN is therefore a critical aspect of their foreign policy objectives.

Many treaty body elections are fiercely competitive, too, and require a campaign strategy and intensive lobbying in New York and relevant capitals. Most successful campaigns require the individual candidate to travel to UN headquarters in New York to engage in a program of bilateral meetings with state parties.

THE MERITS OF COMPETITION

Each of the elections for UN principal organs and subsidiary bodies allocates a fixed number of available seats to the UN regional groups under the principle of equitable geographical representation. In some instances, a regional group will field more candidates than there are available seats in order to force a contest. In many cases, they do not and instead present what's described as a 'clean slate'.

This subject has received renewed interest following the US's recent criticism of the HRC and its proposal for the council's reform. The US's criticism is that many undemocratic countries with poor human rights records are members of the council despite the mandate of the council to 'uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights'.³⁹ For instance, the US highlighted the 2016 elections in which the Africa Group presented four candidates for four seats, resulting in the election of Egypt. Further, the Asia-Pacific Group also presented four candidates for four seats, which caused Saudi Arabia to be elected unchallenged. Similarly, in the imminent elections for the council on 16 October, all regional groups except the Asia-Pacific Group will be presenting clean slates. The election outcome will therefore include the incongruous election of the Democratic Republic of the Congo at a time when the HRC itself has mandated an investigation into atrocities allegedly committed by Congolese security forces in the Kasai region.⁴⁰

The US has therefore proposed that regional groups present contested slates to allow the UN membership to assess the merits of candidatures and keep human rights abusers from obtaining seats: 'elections for membership to the Council are over before the voting even begins ... No competition means no scrutiny of human rights records,' said the US's Permanent Representative to the UN in June 2017.⁴¹ While this proposal will clearly not of itself guarantee that violators of human rights will be excluded from HRC membership, it at least gives member states choice in their voting. In November 2016, member states voted in a competitive slate that denied a seat to Russia, a permanent Security Council member, after its bombing of civilians in Aleppo, Syria. There's emerging support for reform to require competitive slates: 48 states, including Australia, have committed before the HRC to 'strive to ensure competitive HRC membership elections, particularly by encouraging more candidates than seats within each regional group.'⁴²

In Security Council elections, WEOG is the regional group that will always feature a contest. The African Group is usually uncontested, as it has a practice of rotation among its five subregions. The Latin American and Caribbean Group similarly has an informal arrangement to offer a clean slate, which means that, at present, candidates have nominated up to the 2033-34 term. The Eastern Europe Group and the Asia-Pacific Group have no firm rules but present clean slates more often than not.

Table 2: United Nations regional groups of member states

African Group

Algeria	Ethiopia	Nigeria
Angola	Gabon	Rwanda
Benin	Gambia	São Tomé and Príncipe
Botswana	Ghana	Senegal
Burkina Faso	Guinea	Seychelles
Burundi	Guinea-Bissau	Sierra Leone
Cabo Verde	Kenya	Somalia
Cameroon	Lesotho	South Africa
Central African Republic	Liberia	South Sudan
Chad	Libya	Sudan
Comoros	Madagascar	Swaziland
Congo	Malawi	Togo
Côte d'Ivoire	Mali	Tunisia
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Mauritania	Uganda
Djibouti	Mauritius	United Republic of Tanzania
Egypt	Morocco	Zambia
Equatorial Guinea	Mozambique	Zimbabwe
Eritrea	Namibia	
	Niger	

Asia-Pacific Group

Afghanistan	Kyrgyzstan	Saudi Arabia
Bahrain	Lao People's Republic	Singapore
Bangladesh	Lebanon	Solomon Islands
Bhutan	Malaysia	Sri Lanka
Brunei Darussalam	Maldives	Syrian Arab Republic
Cambodia	Marshall Islands	Tajikistan
China	Micronesia (Federated States of)	Thailand
Cyprus	Mongolia	Timor-Leste
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	Myanmar	Tonga
Fiji	Nauru	Turkey*
India	Nepal	Turkmenistan
Indonesia	Oman	Tuvalu
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Pakistan	United Arab Emirates
Iraq	Palau	Uzbekistan
Japan	Papua New Guinea	Vanuatu
Jordan	Philippines	Vietnam
Kazakhstan	Qatar	Yemen
Kiribati	Republic of Korea	
Kuwait	Samoa	

Eastern European Group

Albania	Estonia	Romania
Armenia	Georgia	Russian Federation
Azerbaijan	Hungary	Serbia
Belarus	Latvia	Slovakia
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Lithuania	Slovenia
Bulgaria	Montenegro	The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Croatia	Poland	Ukraine
Czech Republic	Republic of Moldova	

Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC)

Antigua and Barbuda	Dominica	Panama
Argentina	Dominican Republic	Paraguay
Bahamas	Ecuador	Peru
Barbados	El Salvador	Saint Kitts and Nevis
Belize	Grenada	Saint Lucia
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Guatemala	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Brazil	Guyana	Suriname
Chile	Haiti	Trinidad and Tobago
Colombia	Honduras	Uruguay
Costa Rica	Jamaica	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)
Cuba	Mexico	
	Nicaragua	

Western European and Others Group (WEOG)

Andorra	Iceland	Norway
Australia	Ireland	Portugal
Austria	Israel*	San Marino
Belgium	Italy	Spain
Canada	Liechtenstein	Sweden
Denmark	Luxembourg	Switzerland
Finland	Malta	Turkey*
France	Monaco	United Kingdom
Germany	Netherlands	United States of America*
Greece	New Zealand	

*Special cases. For further information, visit: <http://www.un.org/depts/DGACM/RegionalGroups.shtml>

So why is WEOG different? WEOG hosts a group of highly ambitious members, many of which are G20 members and flex considerable diplomatic muscle. They're significant contributors to the UN budget and therefore have expectations of representation in the UN system. They're also prepared to finance the significant costs of a global contest. WEOG engaged in informal consultations throughout 2012 to explore whether a rotation scheme could be agreed for Security Council elections on the basis that the large-scale WEOG contests were costly and unnecessarily divisive of a group of inherently like-minded states. When the reality of the compromises needed to accommodate all WEOG members in a scheme became apparent (including highly ambitious members having to wait considerably longer than they had planned to run for the Security Council), the consultations collapsed. There were just too few slots for ambitious WEOG members for it to be otherwise.

THE AUSTRALIAN APPROACH

Australia currently has good coverage across the UN bodies. Of the principal bodies, we've recently served on the Security Council (and have nominated to serve again for the 2029–2030 term); we'll soon be serving on the HRC, we have a judge on the ICJ; and we're a regular member of ECOSOC. We also regularly seek representation on various subsidiary bodies, such as our current membership of the core UN legal body charged with commercial law reform in international trade (the UN Commission on International Trade Law) and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

Historically, Australian nationals have also been recruited into official positions at the UN. Such appointments are another avenue for Australian influence and diplomacy (see box opposite).

Australia announced its current Security Council candidacy for the 2029–2030 term in September 2015, joining Finland in seeking election to the two available seats. The Foreign Minister explained that Australia's candidacy was announced so far in advance because the term was 'the first available opportunity to nominate for a seat that is uncontested, giving Australia the greatest chance of success and minimising the cost'.⁴³ While that explanation is correct, it's inevitable that another WEOG member will later put forward its candidacy for the same term and force a contest. Our early nomination is therefore clearly helpful. It's important that Australia continue to put itself forward at reasonable intervals for election to the Security Council. This decision-making should be part of an overall strategy for our UN electoral presence.

It's apparent that the Australian Government is increasingly disposed to present UN candidacies and is proactive about identifying candidates. This is commendable. It's also important that the candidacies be selective and be put forward in the context of an overall strategy of engagement. A number of notorious UN member states routinely put forward a plethora of candidacies, some with dubious merits, and most, if not all, are unsuccessful. There's a finite amount of goodwill that states can generally call on to secure support, and candidates send mixed messages on the importance of their candidacies when they stand for too many positions at once. Seasoned candidates typically focus on one election for a principal UN organ at a time.

The Australian Government has described the calculation of deciding to present a candidacy as 'one of ensuring an appropriate and sustainable balance between the resources needed to be invested to get a seat at the table and the level of return on that investment'.⁴⁴ That is, we expect a good bang for our buck.

Australia will no doubt look to build on its UN reputation to make a strong contribution to the work of the HRC. Our interest in serving on the HRC, and announcing our candidacy for a further Security Council term, can be viewed as an effort to maintain our momentum at the UN and sustain our influence.

Australian leadership in the UN

A complementary means to enhance Australia's UN engagement is to lobby for the appointment of Australians to leadership positions in the UN (that is, to seek the recruitment of Australians to key positions throughout the UN system, rather than election to UN bodies). This is an important and effective way to promote Australian influence. An obvious example would have been for the Australian Government to have supported former prime minister Kevin Rudd when he expressed interest in running for appointment as the new UN Secretary-General in 2016. Alternatively, if the government considered Mr Rudd inappropriate for the role (as Prime Minister Turnbull stated it did), it could have promoted another appropriate Australian candidate. Australia's position was markedly different from that of other member states, which enthusiastically presented nationals as candidates for the Secretary-General role. New Zealand was notable for the extensive political and diplomatic support extended to the candidacy of Helen Clark (who had even belonged to a political party in opposition to the nominating New Zealand Government).

Australians have held some substantive senior leadership positions in the UN. Peter Drennan currently serves as the Department of Safety and Security Head. Australians have also held posts as the UN Military Adviser (Tim Ford), UN Police Adviser (Andrew Hughes), UN Force Commander (such as John Sanderson in the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia peacekeeping operation) and Police Commissioner (such as Greg Hinds in the UN Mission in Liberia). But, curiously, Australia has had no Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) serving as the civilian lead in a UN field mission, despite our strong credentials in human rights and Australian civilian leadership of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands. There is an Australian currently serving as the SRSG for Disaster Risk Reduction (Robert Glasser).

There are many highly capable Australians working across the UN and related organisations who would do well if promoted to senior leadership roles in all fields of the UN's work, including political affairs, economic and social affairs, development, human rights, and field mission leadership. Australia is missing potential opportunities for our nationals in the UN system. Although these individuals are employed as international civil servants, they're still viewed by the international community as informal representatives for their countries and are a source of pride within the UN system. To date, there hasn't been a strategic approach or engagement to ensure that Australia is proactively identifying appropriate candidates, supporting them through the UN system and maximising its ability to place qualified Australians into senior UN positions. The Australian Government is now working on a strategy to address this. This is a welcome move.

RECOMMENDATIONS

When Australia completed its last Security Council term at the end of 2014, Richard Gowan, a UN academic expert, commented:

We're entering an extremely uncertain period for world politics, and the question for Australia is will it sit on the margins of the Pacific and be a minor regional player, or does it want to be a global player that can deal directly with Moscow and Washington and Beijing over the big questions of the day? And I think with the presidency of the G20 and more importantly with the stint on the Council, Australia has shown that it's able to play with the biggest powers and it's able to say serious and thoughtful things about how you deal with a crisis like that in Syria. We weren't sure if Australia would have that level of ambition or that level of competence, to be frank, two years ago.⁴⁵

This statement aptly captures the capacity for strong UN electoral engagement to raise the standing and influence of a member state. Australia has shown its level of ambition and competence and should continue to conceive of itself as a global player. Maintaining a strategic level of engagement in elected organs and bodies across the UN, and performing well in our elected roles, will support our interests and our position in the international order.

This paper offers the following recommendations for the Australian Government to strengthen its engagement in UN electoral processes:

1. The Australian Government should, at a minimum, maintain its extensive electoral representation as part of a strategic plan for engagement at the UN. Australia should routinely be represented on significant UN bodies, most particularly the Security Council and HRC, as well as strategic subsidiary bodies that address policy subjects of importance to Australia. This isn't only in recognition of the contribution that Australian expertise can offer to the international community, but to promote Australia's national interests, advance critical global norms and project Australian influence in international forums. This is consistent with Australia's place in the world as a democratic global player.
2. The Australian Government should engage in greater public outreach to the Australian community to strengthen the implementation of its public diplomacy strategy⁴⁶ and to increase awareness about the importance of Australia's UN engagement, including its pursuit of UN candidacies. The outreach should include explanations of the UN's work and how it dovetails with Australia's interests. Many in the Australian community, including politicians and journalists, don't fully understand the nature of the UN's work and don't appreciate the benefits of Australia being active in the UN. The criticism about Australia pursuing a Security Council seat may be partly due to Australia's extended absence from the Security Council since the Cold War era.⁴⁷ It's easy to criticise the UN because of its well-known flaws and high profile failures. But there is little credit for, let alone knowledge of, the exceptional work that the UN performs on a daily basis to deliver on its mandate, including to maintain peace and security, render humanitarian assistance and promote sustainable development. There is also inadequate attention on the contribution that Australia makes to the UN's work and how that is consistent with our national interests. Strategic outreach, including a detailed media strategy and social media campaign that makes the UN more accessible to Australians, would ameliorate this problem. It's apparent that most other member states

that nominate for UN candidacies do so without the domestic reservations and criticism that have accompanied Australian bids (notably Australia's candidacy for the Security Council 2013–2014 term). The impressive work undertaken by Australians, working as experts in UN bodies, could also be better promoted to highlight not only that opportunities do exist for qualified Australians to serve in the UN, but that Australians are being recognised internationally and are contributing to the UN's work.

3. The Australian Government should more strategically engage with Australians working in the UN and related organisations to identify potential candidates for UN elections.
4. Australia should explore strengthening its relationship with non-traditional partners. For example, The Caribbean Community and African Union are made up of many Commonwealth countries that share similar history, culture and tradition with Australia. Strengthening relationships with these countries, and exploring areas of commonalities as a basis for cooperation with countries of other regions, will facilitate Australia's future campaigns for UN bodies. It is also consistent with Australia acting as a sustainable global player rather than being preoccupied with our immediate geographic region.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
HRC	Human Rights Council
ICJ	International Court of Justice
UN	United Nations
WEOG	Western Europe and Others

WHAT'S YOUR STRATEGY?

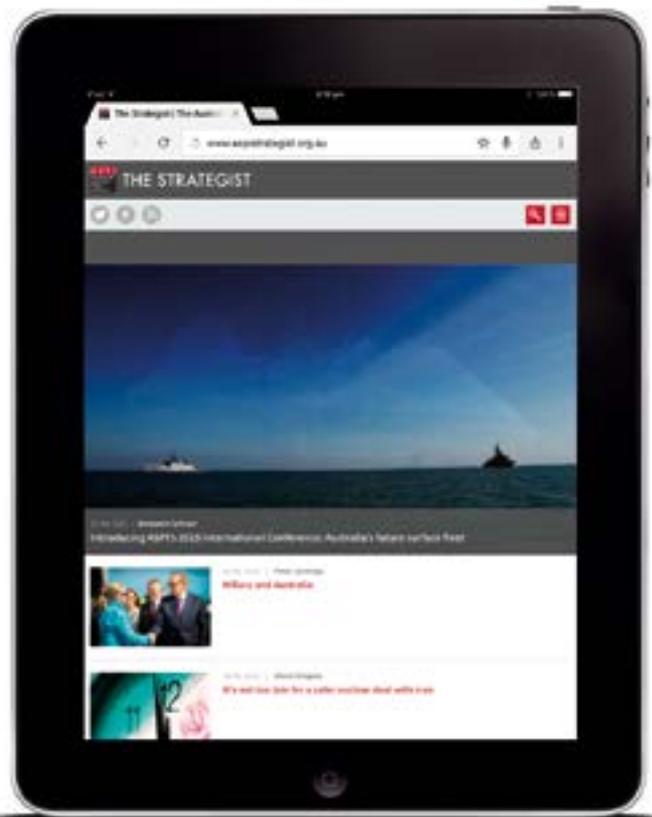


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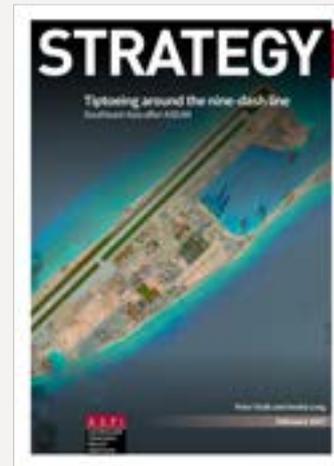
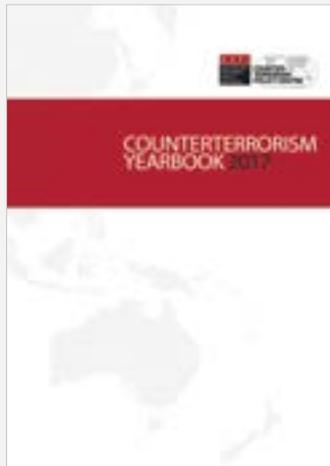
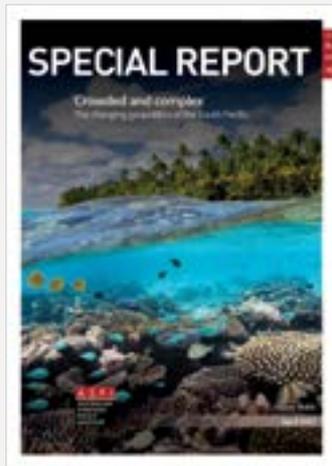


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