

Parliamentary Select Committee  
Foreign Affairs, Defence & Trade

Briefing on UN & UNSC

Terence O'Brien, Senior Fellow; Centre for Strategic Studies

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- New Zealand policy towards the United Nations will, for the next year-and - half be dominated by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) campaign, and, if successful, by UNSC membership for two years after that.
- The international political, security and economic landscape is now quite different from the time of New Zealand's last UNSC tenure in 1993/94. Post 9/11 conflicts have dominated military security, international terrorism and newer challenges of cybersecurity fill the threat horizon while the centre of global economic gravity is shifting, notably to China and other successful newly emergent economies. Global financial crisis has slowed economic growth notably in Europe with real consequences for its political unity and global role; and in the US where long term structural economic defects and political dysfunction persist, even as the US reasserts global leadership
- A more hybrid international system is clearly in prospect, evident in the arrival of the regularised G20 Summit, one where management and agenda setting in international institutions (the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation etc.) will no longer be a western monopoly. That will be the price for sustaining an

effective rules-based international system, which remains a vital New Zealand interest.

- New Zealand's own position on the international landscape is also changed from 1993/94. Our greater reliance upon East Asia, especially China, for New Zealand prosperity has appreciably extended our vital economic dependencies. In the military domain, however, we value restoration of *de facto* alliance with the US; and also formal links with NATO, whose strategic ambition for a global peace and security role will rival or supplant the UN.
- If New Zealand succeeds in its UNSC bid, the sheer force of numbers means it will owe success to support from Asia/ Pacific, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East (the majority of Atlantic governments voted last time for New Zealand's opponents). This must influence the way New Zealand would then position itself on the UNSC. As things stand, three of five P5 UNSC members are NATO founders. That alliance exercises therefore strong influence over the UNSC international security agenda. But against the background of an emerging hybrid international order and its own widening interests, New Zealand will need bear closely in mind preferences and priorities of those countries that put it on the UNSC.
- The post 9/11 security landscape has witnessed military interventions (with or without UNSC authorisation) in the Middle East, Africa and Afghanistan. It has increasingly involved military forces, including New Zealand, in post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation, for which they are not endowed or temperamentally equipped. That does not impugn their valour or professionalism. The UN, however,

possesses the right qualifications, an extensive range of economic and social competence and experience, and long haul temperament. To perform effectively the tasks for which it was indeed originally conceived the UN requires reform, resources, clear mandates and renewed political support especially from P5 UNSC members.

- With our own UNSC bid in mind, such reform should command New Zealand's energetic support. We need as well to carefully ponder further New Zealand involvements ourselves with UN peace support now that New Zealand Defence Force deployments are terminating in Afghanistan, East Timor and the Solomons. We need to sustain a New Zealand profile. The scope for joint operations with those Asian governments which are active in United Nations Peacekeeping should be purposefully sought now to balance and to align our UN and Asian interests more astutely.
- If the bid succeeds New Zealand has promised to make reform of the composition of the UNSC and of use of the veto, a particular priority. This is a worthy cause but ideas to secure such improvements have circulated from many quarters for as long as the UN has existed (the US first proposed some moderation of the veto in 1948). The sheer pace and complexity of daily crisis reduces the disposition and opportunity around the UNSC table to pursue serious structural reform championed by non-permanent members. Small but important improvements to actual Council operating methods have been successfully pursued in the past, including by New Zealand. But these are of a lower order of magnitude and ambition to that being suggested by Minister of Foreign Affairs, Murray McCully.

- The right relationship between the UNSC and the UN General Assembly (UNGA) – representing the entire UN membership – is central to a truly relevant UN. The very nature of modern conflict even when entered into by powerful members with UNSC authorisation frequently tests the ethics of warfare – where distinctions between insurgency, regional separatism and internationalised terrorism are blurred, where preventive strikes, targeted assassinations, torture, rendition and application of extremely lethal force are employed in the name of the UN. Better interaction, transparency and accountability between UNSC and the overall UN membership is paramount. Reforms to achieve that would be a worthy New Zealand UNSC objective.
- Are there lessons from our 1993/94 UNSC campaign that are relevant to pursuit of the current candidature? It is difficult to be absolutely categorical from the position of an onlooker. Based on personal experience with the last New Zealand bid which involved drawing up the campaign blueprint and conducting lobbying right down to the wire in New York, and elsewhere, one or two pointers suggest themselves.
- We need to pace the campaign effectively. We have energised this campaign earlier than was done for 1993/94 effort which was compressed more or less into the 18 months before the actual vote. This more extended effort presumably reflects considered judgement and entails resources that likely exceed the last campaign. The present effort is well grounded with a smart special website to reinforce the campaigning.
- With over 18 months to go there is of course much water still to pass under the bridge. New and unforeseeable crises will influence attitudes

and responses. Right now the New Zealand candidature is not actually uppermost in other governments' thinking, in direct contrast of course to our own intense preoccupation. Even though assurances may be readily given in response to present lobbying, minds in many (most) capitals have not, however, really concentrated on an election for 2015. The competition will also be lobbying with blandishments in all capitals.

- In any event the rule of thumb, given the contested vote and the secrecy of the ballot, is that any UNSC candidate should discount 20% of all assurances of support; this proved pretty accurate in 1993/1994 contested vote; we calculated that on the first ballot New Zealand had, in theory, 125 votes – we received 108, which like one of our competitors (Sweden) was under the two-thirds required for victory, necessitating further round(s) of voting.
- Over the final 12 months of the campaign, the epicentre of the New Zealand effort will shift to New York as minds of others begin to concentrate. As the vote approaches, governments will be consulting their UN Ambassadors for advice about the prospects of competing candidates, and for recommendations about final voting. Experience in 1993 suggested many UN Ambassadors actually carry instructions from capitals that indicate government preferences for the UNSC vote, but extend discretion to the Ambassadors themselves to place the country's ballot when a contest is very close, according to their best judgement. At the bottom line most governments want to back a winner

- In a close run three-way contest, as we experienced in 1993/94, it is quite probable, given the two thirds majority requirement, that a second/third ballot will be needed (New Zealand won last time on the third ballot) to elect two out of three. As a serious precaution therefore this requires a ‘second ballot strategy’ be prepared to be employed as or if needs be when the contenders’ names go back in the hat. Such strategy can only be worked out on the ground in New York, literally before and after the eleventh hour.
- From all of this one lesson is essential. Over that final 12 or so months of the campaign New Zealand must have in place as PR in New York, the Ambassador whom it intends shall represent New Zealand on UNSC for the (successful) two year tenure. Familiarity with fellow UN representatives, with the UN Secretariat and with the chemistry of the whole place unquestionably counts in securing and sustaining support for New Zealand’s objectives.
- That clear lesson derives directly from previous experience. In 1993/94 after taking its seat New Zealand replaced its UNSC Ambassador in mid-stream. This was a severe error that bewildered representatives of countries that had supported the New Zealand candidature as well as inside the UNSG office. It is airbrushed from official New Zealand accounts of the tenure. But any last minute appointment or mid-stream change of guard of the PR must, this time, be avoided at all cost.

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