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## **Israel and the UN Security Council Elections**

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On June 28, 2016, the United Nations General Assembly held elections for five non-permanent seats in the UN Security Council (UNSC) for 2017-2018. The winners of these elections will have a two-year window to help shape global security policy. Indeed, the UNSC is the most powerful and significant organ of the United Nations, responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. As such, it has the legal authority to suspend economic and diplomatic relations between countries, impose blockades, and authorize the use of armed force. Article VII of the UN Charter determines that UNSC resolutions are binding toward all UN member states so that, for example, should the UNSC decide to sanction a specific state, all UN member states would be expected to comply with such a measure. Since 1963, when the Security Council was expanded, it has consisted of five permanent members: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States; and ten temporary members serving for two years. These terms begin in January; with five positions opening each year.

Israel has never been a member of the UNSC and did not compete in the current elections. Nevertheless, according to a study published by the Security Council Report, a non-government organization that closely follows the UNSC, Israel has announced that it plans to run for a seat on the Council in 2018. This warrants a focus on the formal and informal complexities of the elections process and invites the question if it is indeed worth Israel's while to compete.

### **The Election Procedure**

The ten UNSC non-permanent seats are divided among five regional groups: one country from Eastern Europe; two from the Western European and Others Group (WEOG) – which, since the turn of the century, includes Israel; two from the Latin America and Caribbean Group; and five from Africa and Asia. Furthermore, since 1968, an "Arab swing seat" has been unofficially institutionalized based on an informal agreement within the Africa and Asia regional group, whereby one of their five seats is reserved for an Arab state. This arrangement is a product of the 1967 Six Day War, which took place

during a year in which no Arab state was represented in the Council. Since 1968, one seat on the UNSC has been occupied by an Arab country.

The current seat-holders in the WEOG are New Zealand and Spain. The three states that competed for the two vacant WEOG seats are Sweden (which was elected) and Italy and the Netherlands (which given a deadlock in the vote will likely split the membership period into two one-year terms). Each of these three states has been a UNSC member between three to five times in the past. In order to win the election, a state must receive at least two-thirds of the votes in the UN General Assembly. With respect to electing a suitable candidate state, the UN Charter calls to consider “the contribution of members of the United Nations to the maintenance of international peace and security and to the other purposes of the Organization.” On the ground, however, a number of other factors shape the election procedure, including political affiliations and economic strength.

In the backdrop of the formal elections procedure, a number of informal processes occur, bearing influence on the elections' course and results. These are important, particularly if Israel competes for a non-permanent seat in the Council. First, WEOG elections have produced a pattern of contested candidatures with 28 members belonging to this grouping and two seats becoming available every even calendar year. Second, it is customary for candidates to seek voting commitments from member states years in advance of the election, and up until the day of the vote. In other words, campaigning for the Security Council requires significant investments of time and financial resources. Third, as votes are cast by secret ballot, states that promise to vote for a particular candidate do not always keep their word, and it is impossible to determine which states followed through with their pledges and which did not. Fourth, quid pro quo arrangements are not an uncommon element of the campaign process. Such arrangements may even go as far as offering development assistance or promising that while on the Council the state competing for a seat will bring attention to (or avoid) an issue of concern to specific states.

### **Considerations for Israel**

There are varying opinions regarding the potential for non-permanent states to play an influential role in the SC, given the ultimate ability of the five permanent members to veto decisions. Nevertheless, advantages of being elected to the Security Council are readily visible on the procedural, technical, and symbolic levels.

On the procedural level, in order for a resolution to pass in the SC, at least four non-permanent members need to vote in favor. In addition, the role of the President of the Security Council – which influences the agenda and order of voting – rotates among the members. Furthermore, being a member enables states to raise points of interest in discussions, and the UNSC votes by open ballot, so that the voice of an elected member has a global reach on central matters of world security.

On the technical level, those elected to the Security Council are in a position to provide the international system's key player, the United States, and other SC council members with salient favors. In addition, research shows that election to the UNSC predicts financial benefits in the form of World Bank and IMF loans. Finally, membership in this elite body facilitates member states' learning processes regarding the views of others and the leanings of the Council on important issues.

The most significant attribute of such membership, however, is international recognition. Particularly for states such as Israel, whose international standing is eroding, even if access to real influence would be minimal, the jump in status carries importance. Council membership confers status and recognition on a state, increasing the prestige of its diplomats both in New York and around the world. In fact, a UNSC non-permanent seat for an established state has been likened to a UN General Assembly seat for new states, in that it facilitates authority by association.

With this in mind, Israel would be wise to develop a well thought-out strategy in order to pursue a seat in the Security Council. In fact, in June 2016, Israel won an election to chair the United Nations' legal committee, marking the first time that it will head one of the UN's six permanent committees since joining the organization in 1949. This development signifies a welcome shift in Israeli policy from dismissing the UN arena as biased against Israel, to engaging and striving to create a change from within. Taking part in the race for a non-permanent seat in the UNSC should be a natural continuation of this positive policy transformation.

