



REPORT

SMALL STATES, DIFFERENT APPROACHES ESTONIA AND NORWAY ON THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

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The authors

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2021, Estonia and Norway served as elected members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Both being relatively small states, defending multilateral cooperation and rules-based international order were important common goals. In the last decade, great power tensions have returned to the Security Council, and multilateralism has again come under pressure. The opportunities of elected members to substantially influence the UNSC agenda are arguably limited by power struggles, complex subject matter and inefficient working methods.

In spite of these limitations, both Estonia and Norway achieved some important outcomes as members of the Security Council. Their experiences confirm above all the value of diplomatic experience and reputation-building for elected members. To some extent, the two states have also been able to assume ownership of matters on the UNSC agenda. As in any diplomatic setting, knowing how to “play the game” is key to the ability of small states to punch above their weight. Specific methods through which elected members work to influence the UNSC agenda include: (i) coalition-building, (ii) actively using the presidency function, (iii) organising special events, and (iv) assuming the penholder role in a specific country or thematic issue.

Common priority areas of Estonia and Norway in the UNSC include conflict resolution and peace-building, protection of human rights and especially women’s rights, and addressing new security challenges in the fields of cyber and climate. The most significant experience of cooperation during 2021 was the Estonian-Norwegian joint penholdership of the Afghanistan file which brought the two countries to the centre stage of global diplomacy and reinforced their international profile as small states that make an active and professional contribution to multilateral cooperation.

Looking at Estonia’s and Norway’s performance in 2021, some interesting differences can be identified. First, the two states assess the relative importance of the UN differently. In Norway’s foreign policy, there is a strong tradition of prioritising the UN and seeing an active role in multilateral cooperation as an important contribution to national interests and security. By contrast, for Estonia, the UN has not been a foreign policy priority in the past, and its contribution to national security continues to be seen as secondary to membership in Western organisations, notably NATO and the EU.

Furthermore, Norway has generally worked a bit more behind the scenes, relying on its long experience and reputation as a constructive contributor to peace diplomacy. It has been active on issues such as the UNSC’s normative protection agenda and climate security, but also the Afghanistan, Syria and North Korea files. Meanwhile, Estonia has taken a rather bold approach as a newcomer visibly promoting its priorities, most notably the cybersecurity agenda. It has also focused on controversial issues of regional security, including the situations in Ukraine and Belarus, trying to use the UN to the advantage of national security through promoting its positions and strengthening coalitions with like-minded countries.

Coordination between like-minded states is an integral part of the work of the Council. With Estonia and Norway both present, 2021 saw two Nordic-Baltic states concurrently represented in the Council for the first time. In the future, there may be scope for further strengthening Nordic-Baltic cooperation in the framework of the UN structures.



While an elected seat on the Security Council may be a source of international prestige and may strengthen a state's position and its network in the international arena,³ complex subject matter, internal power struggles and inefficient working methods are among the factors often said to leave elected members

An elected seat on the Security Council may be a source of international prestige and may strengthen a state's position and its network in the international arena

INTRODUCTION

For Estonian diplomacy, 7 June 2019 was a day of celebration and high emotions, as the country was elected a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for the first time ever, following a vigorous competition. One year later, on 17 June 2020, it was Norway's turn to win the bid for an elected seat, after a lengthy campaign involving considerable diplomatic efforts and economic resources.¹ In 2021, the two states serve alongside Ireland as elected European members on the Council.² In this report we ask: Why do smaller states like Estonia and Norway invest time, energy and resources seeking a non-permanent seat on the Security Council? What can they hope to achieve during their period as elected members? And how did the two states in question work – individually and together – to achieve their ambitions in 2021 when they were both serving on the Council?

¹ According to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the costs of the campaign in the period 2016–2019 were approximately NOK 29 million (EUR 2.9 million). See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, “Costs related to the campaign for a seat on the UN Security Council,” Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation, 13 February 2020, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/costs-campaign-un-security-council/id2638778/>. In comparison, the Estonian campaign reportedly cost EUR 1.5 million. See Helen Wright, “Feature: Estonia’s UN Security Council non-permanent member seat explained,” *ERR*, 2 January 2020, <https://news.err.ee/1019223/feature-estonia-s-un-security-council-non-permanent-member-seat-explained>.

² In 2021, the ten elected members (end year in parenthesis) are: Estonia (2021), India (2022), Ireland (2022), Kenya (2022), Mexico (2022), Niger (2021), Norway (2022), Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (2021), Tunisia (2021) and Vietnam (2021). Norway and Ireland hold the two available seats reserved for the so-called Western European and Others Group, whereas Estonia represents the Eastern European Group.

with limited room to manoeuvre. Still, smaller states typically highlight national security, system maintenance and the chance to shape and influence the international agenda as their key motivations for pursuing a seat. In the words of then Estonian president Kersti Kaljulaid who played an active role in Estonia's campaign, the UNSC seat gave Estonia a chance to “stand for a better world – for the values, without which we and many other countries and nations would have no place in the world”.⁴ A sense of duty and a commitment to burden sharing appears to weigh in too. Commenting on Norway's victory in the 2020 campaign, then Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Sørdeide highlighted the importance of “small countries like Norway also tak(ing) on the responsibility of sitting [on] the Security Council at regular intervals”.⁵

In what follows, we examine how Estonia and Norway have operated as elected members of the Security Council in 2021 (and in the case of Estonia, also in 2020), including the roles and action repertoires available to them as agenda setters and contributors to the rules-based international order. A study of small-state performances and achievements in the Security Council is not only important but also

³ Niels Nagelhus Schia and Ole Jacob Sending, “Status and sovereign equality: Small powers in multilateral settings,” in *Small State Status Seeking. Norway's Quest for International Standing*, eds. Benjamin de Carvalho, I. B. Neumann (London: Routledge, 2015), 73–85.

⁴ Silver Tambur, “Estonia gains a seat at the UN Security Council,” *Estonian World*, 7 June 2019, <https://estonianworld.com/security/estonia-has-for-the-first-time-elected-a-non-permanent-member-of-the-united-nations-security-council/>.

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, “Norway elected to the UN Security Council,” Press release 103/20, Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation, 17 June 2020, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/norway-elected-to-the-un-security-council2/id2714507/>.

opportune at a time when great power rivalry is on the rise and also multilateral institutions have come under pressure from within. In many ways, 2021 became a pivotal year in this respect, with the COVID-19 pandemic gradually coming to an end and the United States claiming to have resumed its role as a guardian of the rules-based international order.

We proceed in three parts. We begin by looking at the present-day role of the Security Council, the dynamics between permanent and elected members as well as between small and large states and different regional and subregional groupings. Next, we move on to Estonia's and Norway's present terms as UNSC members, summarising their stated ambitions during their election campaigns and the international, regional and domestic contexts shaping their performance. In the final part of the report, we trace and analyse Estonia's and Norway's efforts on the Security Council in 2021, zooming in first on conflict resolution and peace building, and then on new security issues such as health, cybersecurity, and climate security. We draw on data from speeches, documents, media articles, public seminars and background talks with Estonian and Norwegian officials. We also draw on insights from two closed, digital roundtable discussions with policy makers, diplomats and researchers held in November 2020 and March 2021.

The Council's formal decision-making process remains more or less the same as it was when the Council was established 75 years ago, reflecting the international power balance at the end of the Second World War

1. SMALL STATES ON THE SECURITY COUNCIL

1.1. THE RETURN OF GREAT POWER TENSIONS

The decisions of the Security Council have far-reaching consequences – in capital cities, villages, rural areas and remote corners of the world. And yet, the Council's formal decision-making process remains more or less the same

as it was when the Council was established 75 years ago, reflecting the international power balance at the end of the Second World War. As in 1946, the Security Council consists of five permanent members with veto powers (“the P5”) and ten elected member states (“the E10”). To make a resolution or a statement, the Council has to avoid a veto from one of the P5. While the veto power is routinely subject to debate and criticism, including in the UN General Assembly,⁶ it is unlikely to disappear any time soon. This may give an impression of a very static Council with little leeway for its elected members who each serve as members of the Council for a period of two years and compete for seats distributed in groups according to geographical criteria. However, the degree of dominance of the P5 and their use of the veto power must be seen in the context of the current temperature in international politics and the changing level of tension between the great powers.⁷ This backdrop is also affecting the role and action repertoires of the E10, whose ability to influence the Council has fluctuated throughout different historical periods.⁸ During most of the Cold War era, the Security Council was paralysed by the tensions between two of the veto powers: the USA and the Soviet Union. During this period, many UNSC resolutions were vetoed. In the 1990s, when the Cold War had come to an end, there was a better climate for multilateralism. During this period, the Security Council saw a major increase in the number of adopted resolutions, and elected members found increased room to manoeuvre. In the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington DC on 11 September 2001, the Security Council adopted several important resolutions. The USA enjoyed more goodwill from other states, leading for instance

⁶ General Assembly of the United Nations, “Member States Call for Removing Veto Power, Expanding Security Council to Include New Permanent Seats, as General Assembly Debates Reform Plans for 15-Member Organ,” United Nations, GA/12091, 20 November 2018, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/ga12091.doc.htm>.

⁷ Mariana Pimenta Oliveira Baccharini, “Informal reform of the United Nations Security Council,” *Contexto Internacional* 40, no. 1 (January/April 2018): 97–115, <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-8529.2017400100005>.

⁸ Niels Nagelus Schia, “‘Horseshoe and Catwalk’: Power, Complexity and Consensus-Making in the United Nations Security Council,” in *Palaces of Hope – The Anthropology of Global Organizations*, eds. Ronald Niezen and Maria Sapignoli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 68–69.

to Security Council resolution 1373 on the funding of organised terrorism in 2001, and on Iraq's weapons declaration in 2002.

While we may identify similarities between today's situation and the one during the Cold War, it would be inaccurate to describe today's Security Council as paralysed

In the last decade, great power tensions have once again returned to the Security Council, impacting on its work, and multilateralism has again come under pressure. The war in Syria, Russia's annexation of Crimea, influence campaigns against the US election in 2016, and the trade war between the USA and China exemplify developments and events that have generated a suboptimal work climate among the P5 and have also affected dynamics within the Council more broadly. While we may identify similarities between today's situation and the one during the Cold War, it would be inaccurate to describe today's Security Council as paralysed. To begin with, while it is true that some fundamental issues and crises are not addressed in the Council due to P5 disagreements, the Council has still adopted a number of resolutions and presidential statements on topics such as peacekeeping, political missions and the sanctions committees (around 40 resolutions annually), and even on the ongoing politicised crises in Syria, Afghanistan and Myanmar.

Secondly, the P5 members do not initiate all processes in the Council. In recent years, smaller E10 members like Sweden, New Zealand, Australia, Luxembourg and Norway have, for example, been able to push through important resolutions and statements on various topics – even on Syria – during their terms as E10 members.⁹ Thirdly, if resolutions are not possible, E10 members may also push thematic priorities through specific statements and events on, for instance, a conflict, a country or a region. Belgium was, for example, very successful in pushing “protection of children” in presidential statements on Myanmar and Syria, despite resistance from P5 members

⁹ Louise Olsson et al., “Sweden as an Elected Member of the UN Security Council: Promoting Women, Peace and Security as Core Council Business, 2017–18,” PRIO paper (Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2021).

China and Russia; and Estonia succeeded in bringing cybersecurity to the Council's agenda. Finally, E10 members may also influence the Council through informal processes, expert groups, penholding and committees. Knowing how to position oneself and “play the game” can help elected members “punch above their weight” around the horseshoe table.¹⁰ Even if an effort does not immediately materialise in a UNSC resolution or statement, repeatedly calling attention to a topic or situation may raise awareness, and thus help push the matter up on the UNSC agenda in the longer perspective. In the next section, we elaborate on this.

1.2. OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITS FOR SMALL STATES' INFLUENCE

While a recent study finds that the primary stated motivation of states for seeking elected membership of the Security Council is the opportunity to influence the Council's agenda and work, diplomats at member states' permanent missions to the UN evaluate their actual impact in this respect as relatively modest. By contrast, the diplomats reported that building networks and acquiring status were less important motivations for their states in the quest for E10 membership, but more realistic outcomes.¹¹ Hence, while opportunities to achieve substantial influence are somewhat limited by the consensus focus and the veto, stronger diplomatic networks and status are also important benefits of Security Council membership. A final motivation highlighted by many diplomats, is the opportunity to make an active contribution to multilateral cooperation and to build and defend international norms.

¹⁰ Jess Gifkins, “Beyond the veto: Roles in UN Security Council Decision-Making,” *Global Governance* 27, no. 1 (2021): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-02701003>; Schia, “Horseshoe and Catwalk,” 68–69; Ariane Bélanger-Vincent, “Bypass the UN’: Diplomatic Practices and Change in Multilateral Settings,” *PolAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 43, no. 1 (May 2020): 21–36, <https://doi.org/10.1111/plar.12340>; Jeremy Farrall et al., “Elected member influence in the United Nations Security Council,” *Leiden Journal of International Law* 33, no. 1 (March 2020): 101–115, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0922156519000657>; Jenny Nortvedt, “Punching above their weight’: An analysis of small states’ leverage in the case of Syria in the UN Security Council” (Master thesis in Political Science, University of Oslo, 2019).

¹¹ Ann-Marie Ekengren, Fredrik D. Hjorthen and Ulrika Möller, “A Nonpermanent Seat in the United Nations Security Council: Why Bother?” *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organization* 26, no. 1 (2020): 21–45, <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-02601007>.

Furthermore, it is important for smaller states to be present in the Security Council to highlight that the normative structure of states is not hierarchical.

For elected members, and especially smaller ones, room to manoeuvre in the Security Council is limited for several reasons

For elected members, and especially smaller ones, room to manoeuvre in the Security Council is limited for several reasons. To begin with, the P5 have a privileged position not only due to their weight as major powers, but also their long-term experience and better access to information in the Security Council. Secondly, a lot of the Council's agenda is predetermined by previous decisions and ongoing commitments. For smaller states, this may mean the obligation to dig deep into matters that are usually not on their list of foreign policy priorities. For instance, prior to joining the Security Council, Estonia had a limited interest in and experience of the numerous UN missions and sanctions regimes on the African continent. The need to deal with these issues means that a lot of the work of elected members is reactive, leaving limited time and space for proactive promotion of national priorities. As one insider observed in the context of the present study, the P5 have in the past been reluctant to give elected members penholdership, drowning them instead "with work they do not want to do".¹²

Traditional threats, and above all military conflicts, continue to dominate the Security Council agenda. Hence, it has been challenging for smaller states to draw attention to "new" threats in the fields of cybersecurity, climate, health etc

This practice seems to have changed in recent years, however, with elected members not only

¹² Sven Jürgenson, Permanent Representative of Estonia to the UN, at the public webinar of EFPI/ICDS on 24 March 2021. See Sven Jürgenson et al., "UN Security Council in Times of Great Power Rivalry: How Can Small States Make a Difference?" YouTube video, 1:35:38, posted by *International Centre for Defence and Security*, 24 March 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPeaCPP3olc>.

taking on penholdership, but also sharing it (see below). Furthermore, traditional threats, and above all military conflicts, continue to dominate the Security Council agenda. Hence, it has been challenging for smaller states to draw attention to "new" threats in the fields of cybersecurity, climate, health etc., which they have been often keen to do. Smaller states also tend to be more active than larger ones in pursuing normative issues such as women's rights, peace and security and the protection of children in conflicts.

Despite the structural limitations of their position, small states are often very active Security Council members, seeking to raise issues that are important for their security and global position. As insiders observe, more work in the Security Council is done by all fifteen states together, as opposed to P5 versus E10.¹³ Small states usually wish to promote their specific priorities, but at the same time, it is a challenge not to be seen as narrowly promoting one's national interests.

It is an important part of the diplomatic skillset to make the right choices about when to play a visible role and when to stay in the background, and which working methods to choose

It is essential for their reputation and status-building to be seen to work for the greater good and the efficiency of the Council as a whole. Work on national interests may thus get diluted by requirements of the Council dynamics that call for adaptation, compromises and being "part of the parade".¹⁴ Good command of and creative use of working methods is therefore key to smaller states' influence in the Security Council. It is an important part of the diplomatic skillset to make the right choices about when to play a visible role and when to stay in the background, and which working methods to choose in each particular situation.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Niels Nagelhus Schia, "Being Part of the Parade – 'Going Native' in the United Nations Security Council," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 36, no. 1 (2013): 138–156, <https://doi.org/10.1111/plar.12007>.

Coalition-building and coordination with 'likeminded' states is an integral part of the work of the Council. European members often constitute a natural group of likeminded partners, sometimes together with other Western powers. Coordination and cooperation among EU member states has increased during the past two decades, and so too has cooperation between sub-regional groupings such as the Nordics.¹⁵ The Nordic countries constitute a traditionally strong grouping of likeminded countries in various international arenas, including the UN. To some extent,

For the first time, 2021 saw two Nordic-Baltic states represented in the Council at the same time, and a Norwegian insider assessed that the two states are "very likeminded"

this group has now been extended to the three Baltic states, for example, though an increase in joint statements by the Nordic-Baltic states in the UN General Assembly. For the first time, 2021 saw two Nordic-Baltic states represented in the Council at the same time, and a Norwegian insider assessed that the two states are "very likeminded", as are the Nordic and Baltic states more generally.¹⁶ Informal cooperation is also becoming more widespread among elected members of the Council more broadly, even though, as one insider noted, being elected does not in itself make states likeminded on policy.¹⁷

While the E10 is obviously a constantly changing group of states with diverse interests, they generally share the goals of increased openness and transparency and opportunities for elected members to influence the Council's work alongside the P5. Working together, the E10 can be more effective in putting issues on the UNSC agenda. Such coalition building can be time-consuming for diplomats, however, as the Security Council does not operate in a

vacuum. It will often be necessary to (net)work with diplomats in both New York and in the capitals of the Council member states.

A second way in which small states acquire visibility—and status—is through *the presidency of the Security Council* which rotates among the fifteen member states on a monthly basis. The role of presidency provides opportunities to shape the Council agenda and highlight national priorities. Another method often used in but not limited to the presidency period to gain visibility and promote specific issues is to *organise special events*, e.g. informal Arria formula meetings.

As noted above, a more recent opportunity for elected members to acquire influence and prestige is to *take on the role of penholder for a specific dossier*. The "penholder system" has been a contentious issue in the Security Council working methods debate.¹⁸ Penholdership used to be reserved only for the P5 members, but in the framework of efforts to reform the Security Council and divide the work of the Council more equally, the penholder role has been expanded to the elected members. Moreover, it has become common practice for two countries to hold the pen together. In 2013, Austria and Luxembourg took the initiative and started to draft Council conclusions on the humanitarian situation in Syria. From then on, various elected members have taken on the role of penholder on different topics and today the involvement of elected members is the new norm. For example, Estonia and Norway in 2021 were penholders of the Afghanistan file, a role they took over from Germany and Indonesia,¹⁹ while Norway and Ireland hold the pen together on Syria. The penholder system gives one or two members of the Security Council an opportunity to take the lead in work related to one country or thematic issue. The penholders are responsible for calling Security Council meetings on the

¹⁵ Katie V. Laatikainen, "Pushing Soft Power: Middle Power Diplomacy at the UN," in *The European Union at the United Nations: Intersecting Multilateralisms*, eds. Katie V. Laatikainen and Karen E. Smith, Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

¹⁶ Mona Juul, Permanent Representative of Norway to the UN, at the public webinar of EFPI/ICDS on 24 March 2021. See Sven Jürgenson et al., "UN Security Council in Times of Great Power Rivalry."

¹⁷ Closed virtual roundtable organised by EFPI/ICDS on 25 March 2021.

¹⁸ Security Council Report, *The Penholder System* (New York: Security Council Report, 21 December 2018), <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Penholders.pdf>.

¹⁹ Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations, "Foreign Minister Reinsalu: Estonia and Norway ready to take a leading role at the UN Security Council on Afghanistan," Permanent Mission of Estonia to the UN, 20 November 2020, <https://un.mfa.ee/foreign-minister-reinsalu-estonia-and-norway-ready-to-take-a-leading-role-at-the-un-security-council-on-afghanistan/>.

issue in question, proposing joint statements, drafts and proposals, and leading negotiations on the file. When the issue is debated in the Security Council, the penholder countries open the debate and speak first. Most importantly, the penholders have the responsibility to maintain attention on the given country or issue amid the busy Security Council schedule. The penholders oversee the message that the Security Council sends to the public on the issue and thus have the power to bring it to international attention.

Experience suggests that joint ownership helps small states to manage the workload and ensure the necessary knowledge and experience. The role can also expand the scope of individual small states' foreign policy. For example, Estonia's work as penholder on Afghanistan livened up the whole diplomatic network with Estonian diplomats discussing Afghanistan across the world in their bilateral meetings. So, for small states in particular, taking the lead in a country-specific context can provide opportunities for concrete achievements that add value to their Security Council experience.

Estonia's work as penholder on Afghanistan livened up the whole diplomatic network with Estonian diplomats discussing Afghanistan across the world in their bilateral meetings

One of the challenges is to find allies among the P5 whose support can ensure some consistency once the elected members leave the Council and new countries take up their seats. In future, it could be a valuable new practice to share the penholder role between one permanent and one elected member, so as to combine experience, continuity and fresh energy.

On a final note, COVID-19 posed unprecedented new challenges to the work of diplomats anywhere, including the Security Council. Estonia was quick to turn the COVID-19 lockdown to its advantage by introducing new, virtual working methods, making use of its digital expertise and reinforcing its image as

a tech-savvy small state.²⁰ Some of the new working methods, such as enabling virtual participation in special events, are likely to stay on beyond COVID-19, potentially bringing new flexibility and accessibility to the way the UNSC operates.

2. ESTONIA'S AND NORWAY'S PRIORITIES ON THE SECURITY COUNCIL

2.1. ESTONIA'S CAMPAIGN AND PRIORITIES ON THE SECURITY COUNCIL IN 2020–2021

In 2005, the Estonian government decided to apply for membership of the Security Council. The decision came at a time when Estonia had achieved its two major foreign policy goals after restoring independence in 1991. These goals were membership of the EU and NATO (both achieved in 2004). It was time for new challenges and to strengthen the global – in addition to Western – dimension of the country's foreign policy. The official campaign was launched in 2017, although efforts to promote Estonia's bid started earlier, for example, with Prime Minister Taavi Rõivas seeking opportunities to meet various world leaders to talk about the candidacy.²¹ It has been highlighted by diplomats involved in the process that consistency throughout the governmental and foreign affairs structures was key to a successful campaign.²² For example, it was important that embassies across the world

²⁰ E.g. Estonia organised the first ever virtual event of the UNSC on the 75th Anniversary of the End of WWII in Europe, held on 8 May 2020. See "Signature Event in the UN: High-Level Meeting on the 75th Anniversary of the End of World War II in Europe," YouTube video, 6:08:22, posted by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia (*estonianmfia*), 8 May 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ohljz-a1fZE>.

²¹ Government of the Republic of Estonia, "Prime Minister Rõivas gathered support for our candidacy for the United Nations Security Council during the Asia-Europe Summit," Government of the Republic of Estonia, 16 July 2016, <https://www.valitsus.ee/en/news/prime-minister-roivas-gained-support-our-candidacy-united-nations-security-council-during-asia>; Government of the Republic of Estonia, "Rõivas: Estonia's role in the UN is becoming increasingly more important," Government of the Republic of Estonia, 2 May 2016, <https://www.valitsus.ee/en/news/roivas-estonias-role-un-becoming-increasingly-more-important>.

²² Closed virtual roundtable organised by EFPI/ICDS on 25 March 2021.

were equipped to represent and advocate for the Security Council campaign.

With the change in political leadership in Estonia in 2017, the campaign gained new momentum. Newly elected President Kersti Kaljulaid became the patron of the campaign – both putting her persona and the institution of the President at the forefront of the campaign – while Prime Minister Jüri Ratas took the backseat.²³ This meant the campaign gained an active advocate whose name and face were attached to Estonia’s bid both at home and abroad. President Kaljulaid made many visits to UN member nations, many of which served as the first official visits of Estonia. She was also active in New York, where in addition to formal activities she used her love for running as an opportunity to meet UN ambassadors in Central Park for a morning jog.²⁴ In addition, a group of Estonian parliamentarians made visits to UN member states under the helm of the campaign. These trips were used to introduce important interests and products of Estonia such as e-governance and e-education which reflected the “win-win” mindset that motivated Estonia’s campaign. Even if Estonia were to lose, the contacts and networks created through the campaign were expected to benefit Estonia’s other interests in the long term.

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While campaigning, Estonia tried to turn its small state status into an advantage and promised to represent and defend the interests of smaller states on the Security Council. It was inspired by Lithuania’s membership a few years earlier when, in the midst of the Ukraine crisis, Lithuania actively represented Ukraine’s and

²³ It is important to note that Estonia held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2017, where the Prime Minister had a central role.

²⁴ Permanent Mission of Estonia to the UN, “Estonian Permanent Mission to the UN was glad to host the President of Estonia, Ms. Kersti Kaljulaid in New York,” Facebook post, 17 March 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/EstoniaUN/posts/estonian-permanent-mission-to-the-un-was-glad-to-host-the-president-of-estonia-m/2323842104313513/>.

the region’s interests in opposition to one of the P5 members. For Estonia, the choice to run for UNSC membership was not self-evident. The campaign was preceded by a lively domestic debate about whether Estonia should apply at all, with several prominent foreign policy practitioners expressing doubts. The then president Toomas Hendrik Ilves argued that the objectives of the application were unclear and questioned Estonia’s capacity to manage the workload.²⁵ Concerns over the cost were also expressed. Furthermore, there was a concern that as a UNSC member, Estonia would have to visibly take sides on issues that are divisive among its Western allies, notably between

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the US and some European states, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or Iran. A side-effect of this debate was that it motivated the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to actively address the domestic public. Justifying the relevance of the Security Council and the UN system and highlighting its usefulness for Estonia was central to the campaign and continued during Estonia’s membership. Exhibitions, digitally accessible events and a three-part TV series about Estonian diplomats’ work in New York were all targeted to increase awareness and influence public sentiment.

In June 2019, the final vote in the UN General Assembly was between Estonia and Romania, with Estonia winning in the second round by 132 votes to 58. Romania’s last-minute entrance to the competition in 2017 came as an unwelcomed surprise to Tallinn, who had been preparing for the vote for over a decade. Eventually the campaign efforts paid off. The main priorities for Estonia’s term on the Security Council were defined as follows: (i) international law and the protection of

²⁵ “Ilves: Eesti püüd ÜRO Julgeolekunõukogu liikmeks pole mõttekas [Ilves: Estonia’s attempt to become a member of the UN Security Council makes no sense],” *Postimees*, 6 May 2016, <https://www.postimees.ee/3684913/ilves-estii-puud-uro-julgeolekunoukogu-liikmeks-pole-mottekas>.

international peace and security, including the norms-based order; (ii) human rights and conflict prevention; (iii) cybersecurity; (iv) climate change and the international security environment; and (v) improving the working methods of the Security Council.²⁶

Estonia has made active use of the opportunities to promote its priorities, especially cybersecurity and regional security

Estonia is a small state and thus very aware of its limited resources which made it initially hesitant about making the UNSC bid. However, in the fall of 2021, as the country was nearing the end of its two-year term, the gains were acknowledged even by several earlier sceptics.²⁷ Estonian diplomats have stressed the value of the experience gained through UNSC membership as being a unique opportunity for a small state to take part in the ‘top league’ of global diplomacy and learn how to advance its interests alongside major powers. Estonia is also seen to have gained in international visibility and reputation. It has made active use of the opportunities to promote its priorities, especially cybersecurity and regional security, both discussed below. Furthermore, Estonia has signalled its wish to regularly contribute to the work of the Security Council in the future and plans to apply for another UNSC membership in 2050–2051.²⁸

2.2. NORWAY'S CAMPAIGN AND PRIORITIES ON THE SECURITY COUNCIL IN 2021–2022

Norway was one of the founding member states of the UN in 1946, and the very first UN Secretary General, Trygve Lie, was also Norwegian. Since that time, a standard phrase in official Norwegian discourse as well as in the wider policy debate, has been that the UN is the “cornerstone” of Norway’s foreign policy and represents the starting point for its international presence and engagement. Being present in and working through the UN is, in other words, a first-order priority in Norwegian foreign policy, and participation, for example, in international operations is premised on there being a UN mandate legitimising such interference. Reflecting this commitment, Norway has served five times as an elected member of the Security Council, and at regular intervals.²⁹

While Norway must be categorised as a small state in the context of the UN, Norwegian officials firmly believe that Norway has the ability to punch above its weight and make a difference on the global scene

When Norway took up its elected seat in January 2021, twenty years had passed since it had last served on the Security Council. Norway announced its candidacy in 2007, only five years after leaving the Council in 2002. The timing for seeking the seat was prearranged, as Norway forms part of a Nordic rotation agreement where the Nordic states take turns campaigning for a seat and see themselves as representing the region as a whole.³⁰ As a candidate country, Norway highlighted its self-identity and track record as a large donor and steady contributor to international peace

²⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia, “Estonia in the UN Security Council,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed 20 October 2021, <https://vm.ee/en/activities-objectives/estonia-United-nations/estonia-un-security-council>.

²⁷ E.g. public discussion with ambassador and former minister Jüri Luik and chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Estonian Parliament Marko Mihkelson. See Jüri Luik et al., “Maailmapoliitika Jõujooned ÜRO Julgeolekunõukogu Areenil – Eesti ÜRO Julgeolekunõukogus [Forces of World Politics in the arena of the UN Security Council – Estonia in the UN Security Council],” Podcast, 1:31:31, posted by *Arvamusfestival*, 7 September 2021, <https://podcastid.ee/arvamusfestival/maailmapoliitika-joujooned-uro-julgeolekunoukogu-areenil-eesti-uro-julgeolekunoukogus/>.

²⁸ Helen Wright, “Feature: Estonia’s first year on the United Nations Security Council,” *ERR*, 19 January 2021, <https://news.err.ee/1608075136/feature-estonia-s-first-year-on-the-united-nations-security-council>.

²⁹ Norway has served as an elected member on the UNSC in the following five periods: 1949–1950, 1963–1964, 1979–1980, 2001–2002 and 2021–2022.

³⁰ Sweden was the previous Nordic member, serving from 2017–2018. Iceland lost the bid for a seat in 2008. While the Nordics have had a stated ambition to join forces on the international scene, Nordic cooperation at the UN is not as extensive as one might expect. See Kristin Haugevik and Ole Jacob Sending, “The Nordic Balance Revisited: Differentiation and the Foreign Policy Repertoires of the Nordic States,” *Politics and Governance* 8, no. 4 (2020): 441–450, <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i4.3380>.

operations, an “honest broker” which has both invested in and acquired competency and expertise in international systems maintenance. While Norway must be categorised as a small state in the context of the UN, Norwegian officials firmly believe that Norway has the ability to punch above its weight and make a difference on the global scene: “Everyone [on the Security Council] listens to Norway. Not all countries experience that”, Norway’s Military Advisor to the UN Delegation observed a few weeks after Norway had taken up its seat.³¹ Norway’s stated interest in seeking a seat on the Security Council lies in the provision of national security through multilateral arrangements, in contributing to international order and stability and in being able to access and influence the international agenda and priorities. However, scholars observe that serving on the Security Council also represents an opportunity for Norway to be “part of the parade” and to acquire, uphold and display international status and prestige.³² This includes building networks, making oneself interesting to and relevant for greater powers and educating one’s diplomatic apparatus.

Serving on the Security Council also represents an opportunity for Norway to be “part of the parade” and to acquire, uphold and display international status and prestige

During the thirteen years of campaigning, there was very little public debate about Norway running for a seat on the Security Council. As with the four previous Norwegian campaigns for Security Council membership, most of the political parties in Norway supported the campaign, and the criticism from politicians mainly came from a handful of members of the right-wing Progress Party. Additionally, there was some limited debate between academics and experts, but this never reached the frontpages or headlines of major news channels. Three criticisms recurred: Firstly, *why should Norway compete with states like Canada and Ireland for the*

³¹ Mikal Hem, “Militærårad i Sikkerhetsrådet: – Norge blir lyttet til av alle [Military Councilor in the Security Council],” Forsvarets forum, 20 January 2021, <https://forsvaretsforum.no/fn-utenriks/militaer-rad-i-sikkerhetsradet-norge-blir-lyttet-til-av-alle/177779>.

³² Schia, “Being Part of the Parade.”; Schia and Sending, “Status and sovereign equality.”

European seat, when these states were for all intents and purposes “likeminded” allies who would work for the same values? Secondly, *how much influence* could Norway – and the Norwegian people – realistically hope to achieve on the Security Council, in light of the time and resources invested?³³ And thirdly, is it in Norway’s interest to position itself in *the hot spot between the greater powers* – and to also risk being in disagreement with the United States and China on more controversial issues?³⁴ Thus, the doubts were very similar to the ones aired in the Estonian domestic discussion described above.

Furthermore, the Norwegian government presented a white paper on Norway’s role and interest in multilateral cooperation in June 2019, just one year before the Security Council election day. The white paper warned about how *multilateralism is under pressure* and stressed the importance of rules-based international cooperation and how Norway, being a small state, depends on it. As put by then Foreign Minister Sjøreide: “Effective international cooperation is needed to address challenges such as climate change, marine litter and new security threats”.³⁵ The white paper also highlighted the UN Security Council as being the only international body with a mandate to adopt legally binding resolutions on international peace and security and that helping the Council to solve these tasks is in Norway’s interests.³⁶ The white paper did not spur a whole lot of debate in Norway, and the reason for this is most likely the rather broad agreement, both between political parties, but also among academics, experts and journalists,

³³ See e.g. Axel Fridstrøm, “Norge bør tape kampen om Sikkerhetsrådet [Norway should lose the battle for a Security Council seat],” *Minervanett*, 5 July 2018, <https://www.minervanett.no/erna-solberg-eu-fn/norge-bor-tape-kampen-om-sikkerhetsradet/181590>.

³⁴ Tore Gjerstad, “Kritisk til norsk sjarmoffensiv: – Å ta plass i Sikkerhetsrådet er å be om bank [Critical towards Norwegian charm offensive: To assume a seat on the Security Council, is to ask for trouble],” *Dagens Næringsliv*, 24 September 2019, <https://www.dn.no/politikk/fn/sikkerhetsradet/asle-toje/kritisk-til-norsk-sjarmoffensiv-a-ta-plass-i-sikkerhetsradet-er-a-be-om-bank/2-1-676083>.

³⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, “Government presents white paper on Norway’s role and interests in multilateral cooperation,” Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation, 14 June 2019, https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/pm_whitepaper/id2654480/.

³⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, *Norway’s Role and Interests in Multilateral Cooperation*, Melding til Stortinget 27 (2018–2019), Report to the Storting (white paper) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019), 38.

concerning multilateralism and that this is such an important part of Norwegian foreign policy traditions.

In preparing to take up its seat on the Security Council in January 2021, the Norwegian government identified four overarching thematic priorities for its two-year term: (i) peace diplomacy, (ii) inclusion of women, (iii) protection of civilians, and (iv) climate change and security.³⁷ Norway has taken a whole-of-government approach to the period as an elected member of the Council. In addition to an eight-person coordination team and the UN Mission in New York, the effort involves “the entire” Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) as well as other government ministries. On the Council, Norway assumed the role as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the Sanction Committees on North Korea and on ISIL and Al-Qaida. In addition, Norway has been a co-penholder of the Syria humanitarian assistance dossier (with Ireland) and the Afghanistan dossier (with Estonia). Norway is also the co-chair of an informal expert group on the linkage between climate change and security risks.³⁸ At home, the MFA also joined forces with the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) to organise a dialogue forum with thematic roundtable meetings about current issues on the Security Council’s agenda during Norway’s period as an elected member.³⁹

3. SHARED PRIORITIES FOR ESTONIA AND NORWAY

3.1. CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACEBUILDING

Security in the post-Soviet space has been a major priority for Estonia in the Security Council. Conflicts in the post-Soviet space are a typical example of matters where divisions among the P5 members prevent the Council from taking a common position and working effectively towards conflict resolution. The Ukraine crisis in particular has been a prominent issue for the Council, while the unresolved conflicts in Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh have received less attention. In addition, since August 2020, the domestic political crisis in Belarus has been addressed in the Security Council numerous times.

Conflicts in the post-Soviet space are a typical example of matters where divisions among the P5 members prevent the Council from taking a common position and working effectively towards conflict resolution

Since the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, related great power tensions and deep disagreements over key issues of international security have been continuously exposed in the UN and its Security Council. On 27 March 2014, nine days after the annexation, the General Assembly adopted a non-binding resolution where the UN for the first time took a position on this issue. The resolution on the “Territorial integrity of Ukraine”, adopted with 100 votes in favour, 11 against and 58 abstentions, called on states not to recognise any change in the status of Crimea and to refrain from actions that disrupt Ukraine’s national unity and territorial integrity. The majority of UN members condemned the annexation as a violation of international law and the UN Charter. The Russian representative, however, defended the ‘self-determination’ of Crimeans and welcomed the reunification of Crimea

³⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, “The Security Council: Norway’s Priorities,” Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation, 10 September 2020, https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/foreign-affairs/the-un/unsc_priorities/id2701066/.

³⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, “Norway assumes key leadership tasks in UN Security Council,” Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation, 8 January 2021, https://www.regjeringen.no/en/historical-archive/solbergs-government/Ministries/ud/news1/2021/tasks_unsc/id2827720/.

³⁹ Niels Nagelhus Schia and Ulf Sverdrup, “The UN Security Council, Afghanistan and Norway,” Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 4 October 2021, <https://www.nupi.no/en/News/The-UN-Security-Council-Afghanistan-and-Norway>.

and Russia.⁴⁰ Ever since then, contradicting narratives on Ukraine and other conflicts in the post-Soviet region have been repeatedly aired in UN debates, without any substantial movement closer to a solution. Discussions on a possible UN peacekeeping force peaked in 2017 but stalled due to the irreconcilable approaches of Russia on the one hand and Ukraine with its western partners on the other.⁴¹

In spite of the limited impact of the Security Council on conflicts in the post-Soviet space, keeping high-level international attention on regional security concerns has been an important priority of Estonia while on the Council, as it was for Lithuania a few years earlier

The Ukraine crisis had a notable negative impact on the security situation in the Baltic Sea region, with the Baltic states being most concerned about the deterioration of their national security. Thus, they have used every possible international venue to express support for Ukraine and to condemn violations of international law. In spite of the limited impact of the Security Council on conflicts in the post-Soviet space, keeping high-level international attention on regional security concerns has been an important priority of Estonia while on the Council, as it was for Lithuania a few years earlier. Lithuania happened to be on the Security Council in 2014–15 when the Ukraine crisis broke out, and hence this became the issue to which Lithuania made the most active contribution. Together with the UK and the US, Lithuania repeatedly pushed the issue on the Council agenda, organised frequent meetings and consultations in various formats and established an informal group of friends of Ukraine.⁴²

⁴⁰ General Assembly of the United Nations, “General Assembly Adopts Resolution Calling upon States not to Recognize Changes in Status of Crimea Region,” United Nations, GA/11493, 27 March 2014, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/ga11493.doc.htm>.

⁴¹ Richard Gowan, *Can the United Nations unite Ukraine* (Washington DC: Hudson Institute, February 2018), <https://www.hudson.org/research/14128-can-the-united-nations-unite-ukraine>.

⁴² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, *Lithuania at the United Nations Security Council 2014–2015* (Vilnius: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016).

Estonia has continued the work on countering Russia’s narrative on Ukraine. In March 2020 and again in March 2021, Estonia convened a Security Council meeting marking the annexation of Crimea which provided an opportunity to highlight the deteriorating human rights situation and heavy militarisation in Crimea. In April 2020, Estonia initiated a joint statement from the European Union member states on the Security Council that condemned Russia’s lack of cooperation in the investigation of the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine in July 2014.⁴³ From December 2020 to June 2021, Russia organised four informal Arria-formula meetings on Ukraine where it promoted its narrative about the conflict. In response, Estonia with other like-minded countries issued joint statements that condemned attempts to “divert the attention of the international community from Russia’s ongoing destabilising activities against Ukraine over the last seven years”.⁴⁴ In the UNGA, Nordic-Baltic countries issued joint statements on the “temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine”, condemning violations of international law by the Russian Federation.⁴⁵

⁴³ Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations, “Stakeout by Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany and Poland on MH-17,” Permanent Mission of Estonia to the UN, 8 April 2020, <https://un.mfa.ee/stakeout-by-belgium-estonia-france-germany-and-poland-on-mh-17/>.

⁴⁴ Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations, “Joint Statement by current and former UN Security Council members following Russia’s Arria-formula Meeting on Odessa events,” Permanent Mission of Estonia to the UN, 5 May 2021, <https://un.mfa.ee/joint-statement-by-current-and-former-un-security-council-members-following-russias-arria-formula-meeting-on-odessa-events/>.

⁴⁵ Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations, “Statement at the General Assembly on the Situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine,” Permanent Mission of Estonia to the UN, 20 February 2020, <https://un.mfa.ee/statement-at-the-general-assembly-on-the-situation-in-the-situation-temporarily-occupied-territories-of-ukraine/>; Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations, “Statement on behalf of Baltic and Nordic countries at United Nations General Assembly 75th Session 54th plenary meeting Agenda item 65 ‘The situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine,’” Permanent Mission of Estonia to the UN, 23 February 2021, <https://un.mfa.ee/statement-on-behalf-of-baltic-and-nordic-countries-at-united-nations-general-assembly-75th-session-54th-plenary-meeting-agenda-item-65-the-situation-in-the-temporarily-occupied-territories-of-ukraine/>; Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations, “Joint statement by Estonia, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway & Sweden on the militarization of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea at UNGA,” Permanent Mission of Estonia to the UN, 7 December 2020, <https://un.mfa.ee/joint-statement-by-estonia-denmark-finland-iceland-latvia-lithuania-norway-amp-sweden-on-the-militarization-of-the-autonomous-republic-of-crimea-at-unga/>.

The political crisis that unfolded in Belarus after the fraudulent presidential elections of August 2020 provided another opportunity for Estonia to be active in regional security matters. Following the violent crackdown of post-election protests, Estonia initiated the first discussion in the Security Council on the events in Belarus on 18 August.⁴⁶ This was followed by numerous other discussions, statements and informal Arria-formula events calling for new elections in Belarus and respect for human rights and media freedom. In such discussions, Russia took the position of defending the Belarusian authorities and accusing western countries of double standards and meddling in Belarus' internal affairs.⁴⁷

Ukraine and the Belarusian opposition appreciated the efforts made to keep these issues on the Security Council agenda

Through its responses to both the Ukraine and Belarus issues, Estonia gained valuable diplomatic experience in promoting its positions and strengthening its networks at the highest international level. Ukraine and the Belarusian opposition appreciated the efforts made to keep these issues on the Security Council agenda. Yet it should also be noted that the Security Council discussions have not had any notable positive effect on the situation in either Belarus or Ukraine.

Turning to Afghanistan, Estonia and Norway took over penholdership of the Afghanistan file in January 2021, knowing it was going to be a particularly challenging period in a protracted conflict. Both countries had previously been involved in the military mission and in development cooperation in Afghanistan. Now they assumed responsibility at a new level, steering international conflict resolution efforts and seeking common ground among P5

⁴⁶ Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations, "Estonia initiated a discussion on the events in Belarus at the UN Security Council," Permanent Mission of Estonia to the UN, 18 August 2020, <https://un.mfa.ee/estonia-initiated-a-discussion-on-the-events-in-belarus-at-the-un-security-council/>.

⁴⁷ E.g. "Russian diplomat turns meeting to support Belarus into an attack on Estonia," *ERR*, 24 January 2021, <https://news.err.ee/1608084259/russian-diplomat-turns-meeting-to-support-belarus-into-an-attack-on-estonia>.

and other Security Council members. Prior to the Estonian-Norwegian penholdership, the situation was fragile: in September 2020, the Council had welcomed the start of Afghanistan

Estonia and Norway took over penholdership of the Afghanistan file in January 2021, knowing it was going to be a particularly challenging period in a protracted conflict

Peace Talks, soon followed by a terrorist attack in Kabul claimed by ISIL, that was condemned by the Council.⁴⁸ The US plan to pull out raised concern about the security situation and the continuation of peace efforts. One of the first major efforts of Estonia and Norway was to achieve a Security Council statement condemning the targeted killings of civilians in Afghanistan.⁴⁹ Yet the killings continued, while Estonia and Norway kept the attention of the Council on the situation and called for pressure to be applied to the Taliban to engage in negotiations.⁵⁰

Approximately 24 hours after Kabul was taken over by the Taliban, Estonia and Norway – in their penholder roles – requested a meeting of the Security Council

⁴⁸ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, "Security Council press statement on terrorist attack in Kabul education center," UNAMA, 27 October 2020, <https://unama.unmissions.org/security-council-press-statement-terrorist-attack-kabul-education-center>; United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, "Security Council press statement on the start of Afghanistan peace negotiations," UNAMA, 18 September 2020, <https://unama.unmissions.org/security-council-press-statement-start-afghanistan-peace-negotiations>.

⁴⁹ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, "Security Council press statement on targeted attacks against civilians in Afghanistan," UNAMA, 12 March 2021, <https://unama.unmissions.org/security-council-press-statement-targeted-attacks-against-civilians-afghanistan>.

⁵⁰ Permanent Mission of Norway to the United Nations, "SC: Afghanistan. Statement by Deputy Permanent Representative Odd-Inge Kvalheim on the situation in Afghanistan," Permanent Mission of Norway to the UN, 6 August 2021, <https://www.norway.no/en/missions/UN/statements/security-council/2021/sc-afghanistan3/>; Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations, "Statement by DPR Mr Andre Lipand at UN Security Council briefing on Afghanistan," Permanent Mission of Estonia to the UN, 6 August 2021, <https://un.mfa.ee/statement-by-dpr-mr-andre-lipand-at-un-security-council-briefing-on-afghanistan/>.

The situation took a dramatic turn following the withdrawal of coalition forces and the unexpectedly rapid return to power of the Taliban in mid-August. These events threw Afghanistan into the centre of world affairs and to the top of the Security Council agenda. Approximately 24 hours after Kabul was taken over by the Taliban, Estonia and Norway – in their penholder roles – requested a meeting of the Security Council, which was set up for 16 August. As a result of joint efforts, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2593 on 30 August 2021, including a call to allow citizens to leave Afghanistan and a plea for human rights and women’s rights to be upheld and the allowance of access for aid.⁵¹ Another important joint effort was to forge consensus in the Security Council on an extension of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which was reached on 17 September.⁵²

Both Estonia and Norway listed human/civilian rights and women’s rights as objectives for their actions on the UN Security Council,⁵³ so calling the Security Council to action against human rights abuses and maltreatment of women in Afghanistan was a natural shared priority. The two countries’ efforts together in the Security Council for this and other issues have been seen as “an excellent example of cooperation in the UN security council”.⁵⁴ Operating at the centre of global diplomacy was also a valuable experience which according to initial assessments has increased the visibility and reputation of the penholders.⁵⁵

3.2. NEW SECURITY CHALLENGES

Scholars and pundits have pointed out that for the Security Council to maintain a key role in international politics further into the 21st century, it must be enabled to also deal with new types of global security threats.⁵⁶ Incorporating new security threats into the Security Council agenda can be difficult, however, not least due to the power dynamics among the P5 and between the P5 and the elected members. It may take years of diplomatic preparations.

Since 1945, the meaning of “international peace and security” has changed dramatically

However, the Security Council has 75 years of experience adapting to a changing world. Since 1945, the meaning of “international peace and security” has changed dramatically. The Security Council, as set out in the UN Charter, was originally designed to respond to war between states, that is, inter-state conflicts. We may refer to this as the “first wave” of Security Council developments. Through the 1990s, the Council also began to respond to “new” security challenges, gradually expanding its mandate into war within states – intra-state conflicts. This came to represent the “second wave” of developments.

Climate change and cybersecurity can be identified as prioritised areas for both the Estonian and Norwegian agendas in the Security Council

In this last decade, the Security Council has increasingly developed its responses across new thematic issues such as climate change, cybersecurity and global health crises – what may be called the “third wave”. Each shift by the Security Council – from interstate war to civil war, to thematic crises – can be seen as an evolution towards an increasing concern for human security. Two of the abovementioned issue areas – climate change and cybersecurity – can be identified as prioritised areas for

⁵¹ United Nations Security Council, “Adopting Resolution 2593 (2021), Security Council Condemns Deadly Attacks in Afghanistan, Calls for Combating Terrorism, Upholding Human Rights,” UN Security Council, SC/14620, 30 August 2021, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14620.doc.htm>.

⁵² Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations, “Joint Press Stakeout by Estonia and Norway on the occasion of the adoption of the UNSC resolution renewing the mandate of UNAMA,” Permanent Mission of Estonia to the UN, 17 September 2021, <https://un.mfa.ee/joint-press-stakeout-by-estonia-and-norway-on-the-occasion-of-the-adoption-of-the-uns-resolution-renewing-the-mandate-of-unama/>.

⁵³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, “The Security Council.”; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia, “Estonia in the UN Security Council.”

⁵⁴ “Estonian formin: Common voice of Nordic-Baltic states is strong,” *The Baltic Times*, 28 March 2021, https://www.baltictimes.com/estonian_formin_common_voice_of_nordic-baltic_states_is_strong/.

⁵⁵ “Eesti ÜRO Julgeolekunõukogus [Estonia in the UN Security Council],” ETV video, 28:04, 20 September 2021, <https://etv.err.ee/1608333572/eesti-uro-julgeolekunoukogus>.

⁵⁶ Eneken Tikk and Niels Nagelhus Schia, “The Role of the UN Security Council in Cybersecurity – International Peace and Security in the Digital Age,” in *Routledge Handbook of International Cybersecurity*, eds. Eneken Tikk and Mika Kerttunen (New York: Routledge, 2020), 354–365; *Ibid.*, 354.

both the Estonian and Norwegian agendas in the Security Council. Norway is, for example, co-chairing an informal expert group on the linkages between climate change and security risks in the various country situations, and has identified climate security as one of its four prioritised topics. Estonia's main priority issue in the Council is cybersecurity.

While the drafters of the UN Charter deliberately made the organisation broad and flexible, they probably did not envisage that the Security Council seven and a half decades later would be involved in responding to health crises, environmental concerns or cybersecurity. The increasing shift towards human security has profound implications for how the UN, as well as individual states, respond to security threats. If "security" is narrowly understood as military threats from other states, then governments are likely to amass weapons and pursue military alliances to respond to the potential of attack. However, if security is broadly understood to encompass also facets of human security – including for instance climate change, cybersecurity and health security – then governments are likely to respond by stockpiling personal protective equipment (PPE) for healthcare workers, promoting a clean and safe environment, and exhibiting good state behaviour in cyberspace. So far, these three new issue areas have been subject to very few formal debates and even fewer adopted resolutions. At the same time, this is an area where many E10 members seem to see opportunities for influence, and for avoiding the P5 deadlocks that often materialise when faced with intra- and inter-state conflicts.

3.2.1. CLIMATE SECURITY

Climate security is listed as one of the priorities for both the Estonian and Norwegian Security Council membership, and Norway in particular has been active on this issue in 2021. In its role co-chairing the Council's expert group on this topic with Ireland, Norway has the potential to be able to push the Council's agenda on this topic. This does not mean that Norway (or any other state) has "carte blanche" to formulate policies on climate security in the Council. Firstly, when the Security Council is dealing with climate change, this is tightly

connected to security and the responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. This means that the Security Council is dealing with *climate security* and not climate change as such. Secondly, climate security is also a contested topic between the P5 members. While the three Western members of the P5

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– the United States, the United Kingdom and France – have usually been in favour of putting this on the agenda, Russia and China have been more sceptical. This has resulted in a cumbersome process.

Although climate security was first put on the Security Council's agenda in 2003, progress has been limited. It took four years for the Council to hold its first debate on the topic: "the security implications of climate change and related issues such as access to energy, water and food"⁵⁷. In 2011, Germany initiated an open debate and led a process which, after difficult negotiations, resulted in a presidential statement (2011). During the negotiations, the US ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, addressed the Council and warned about potential harm if it was unable to "reach consensus on even a simple draft presidential statement that climate change has the potential to impact peace and security in the face of the manifest evidence that it does"⁵⁸. Failure to adopt this statement would be irresponsible, she further claimed. Fourteen years after the first debate, the Security Council has recognised the connections between climate and security in many countries, it has held a series of debates and meetings, and adopted a presidential statement. However, the Council has yet to adopt a thematic,

⁵⁷ Security Council Report, *The UN Security Council and Climate Change* (New York: Security Council Report, 21 June 2021), 5, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/climate_security_2021.pdf.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

overarching framework resolution on climate security, as it has done on other topics such as the resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (1325), Protection of Civilians (1265 and 1674), and food security (2417).

Fourteen years after the first debate, the Security Council has recognised the connections between climate and security in many countries

New initiatives from the UK and the USA in 2021 have pushed climate change higher up on the Security Council agenda and also established a slightly collective agreement on how climate as a security threat should be understood and what this implies for the Council. While China recently has become slightly more positive towards this agenda, Russia still needs to be convinced. In the current Council, there are now only two or three member states questioning the connections between climate and security, claiming that this should be discussed elsewhere in the UN organisation. Through its role as a co-chair of the expert group, Norway is continuing the German initiative from 2020 in pushing, together with other likeminded countries, for a thematic resolution on climate security. Furthermore, Norway, in the capacity of this role is searching for options on how to approach climate security through UN peacekeeping operations, but also through new institutional innovations such as to establish a special representative for climate security and to strengthen the analytical capacity in the UN.

3.2.2. CYBERSECURITY

Despite forceful rhetoric from state leaders, global media houses and leaders of international organisations including NATO and the UN, no P5 country has yet brought cybersecurity to the Security Council.⁵⁹ Other countries – for instance, Lithuania and the Netherlands – have considered introducing cybersecurity issues in the Council, but until June 2021, when Estonia organised the first open debate of the Security

Council on cybersecurity, no substantial action other than a few Arria meetings had taken place.

For the Estonian E10 membership, cybersecurity has been the highest prioritised topic. Even during their campaigning in 2018, before the country was elected to the Council, the Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid claimed that Estonia would take all topics concerning cybersecurity and artificial intelligence to the Security

Council. More specifically, President Kaljulaid highlighted that Estonia's ambition was to push governments around the world to take a stronger role in establishing cybersecurity norms and monitoring threats.⁶⁰ As such, cybersecurity was the one key campaign element for Estonia and among the top priorities that were promised to the electorate. Poland, Spain and Japan had also tried to push this topic in the Council, but never as a stand-alone issue as was Estonia's aim. We have already mentioned how introducing new topics to the Security Council agenda is a difficult task and requires diplomatic fine tuning as well as the will of the P5. As such, Estonia began its preparations early and spent two years preparing the first official Council debate which came in June 2021. This was a breakthrough and was seen as a big diplomatic victory in Estonia.⁶¹

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Prior to this breakthrough meeting, cybersecurity had reached the Council's horseshoe table a couple of times during Estonia's membership term, but never as a stand-alone issue in a formal Security Council meeting. The first time was in March 2020 when Estonia, together with the UK and the

⁵⁹ Tikki and Schia, "The Role of the UN Security Council in Cybersecurity," 354–365; *Ibid.*, 354.

⁶⁰ See Adam Janofsky, "Estonian President, Eyeing Bigger U.N. Role, Urges Government Action on Cybersecurity," *The Wall Street Journal*, 5 April 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/estonian-president-eying-bigger-u-n-role-wants-to-raise-cybersecurity-on-global-agenda-1522874300>.

⁶¹ Interview with an Estonian diplomat, 6 October 2021.

USA, raised the issue of the cyberattacks on Georgian government and media websites under the UNSC's AOB (Any Other Business).⁶² The second time was through an Estonian initiative for an Arria meeting on norms for good state behaviour in cyberspace in May 2020. This meeting was followed up in August 2020 with another Arria meeting focusing on cyberattacks against critical infrastructure, initiated by Indonesia.⁶³ Arria meetings are informal meetings in the UN Security Council and are easier to arrange because they do not have any status in the Council's decision-making process, however, they are good forums in which to draw the Council's attention to a certain topic.

The third time cybersecurity reached the Council's agenda was the actual open debate in June 2021. Being a formal meeting, this one took longer to prepare for than the Arria meetings and required much diplomatic groundwork because it needed the agreement of all of the members of the Council. This meeting was first and foremost an awareness raising meeting but was in a sense a delivery on Estonia's promises to hold the first formal Security Council meeting on cybersecurity. It included the least common denominator of what the Council members could agree on, but the actual meeting was held, and thus a new agenda item on the Council was perhaps opened up for other member states to follow-up. Another ambition for Estonia was to successfully negotiate a cybersecurity resolution based on the discussions in the open debate. During fall 2021, the country was negotiating such a resolution, but this is a cumbersome process and takes months to achieve and has to be carefully negotiated and navigated in view of the diverging interests within the P5.

Cybersecurity is not among the listed priorities for the Norwegian government in the Security Council. However, recent cybersecurity

incidents like the attack on the Norwegian company Hydro, and the hacking of Norwegian parliamentarians in 2020 have highlighted digital vulnerabilities as global challenges in Norway. Still, Norway is not very likely to raise this topic in their term but might have to take a position if other countries put cybersecurity on the agenda or if something happens – such as a major incident or attack.

3.2.3. GLOBAL HEALTH AND SECURITY

In global health security, the Security Council has recently adopted a couple of resolutions, but prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, resolutions made were somewhat limited in scope and number. The first resolution (1308, adopted in 2000) was aimed at the HIV/AIDS-pandemic and its effect on society and social stability, including questions concerning violence and insecurity, as well as testing and training of UN staff in peacekeeping missions. In 2014 and 2018, the Security Council adopted three resolutions related to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and the Congo (2176, 2177 and 2439). These resolutions are clearer than the previous resolutions on how the health situation constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

Even though the resolutions use careful wording when describing the threats, such as “encourage” and “recognizes the challenges”, such an outbreak is recognised as a threat against ongoing peacekeeping processes and for its negative effect on politics and security, as well as on the socioeconomic and humanitarian situation in the region. Furthermore, these resolutions also highlight the importance of coherence and coordination between states and organisations, as well as the need to reduce the negative impact of the outbreak in fragile states. In 2016, the Security Council also discussed health and its connections to medical and humanitarian staff in conflict areas (resolution 2286). These trends became even more prominent in July 2020, when the first resolution on COVID-19 was adopted (2532) in which the Security Council called for a global ceasefire. This resolution was followed up in 2021 with resolution 2565 which asked for humanitarian breaks and dealt with questions concerning global vaccine distribution. Resolutions 2532 and 2565 are broader in scope than previous resolutions

⁶² See Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations, “Stakeout on cyber-attack against Georgia by Estonia, the United Kingdom and the United States,” Permanent Mission of Estonia to the UN, 5 March 2020, <https://un.mfa.ee/press-stakeout-by-estonia-the-united-kingdom-and-the-united-states-on-cyber-attack-against-georgia/>.

⁶³ See Security Council Report, “Arria-formula Meeting on Cyber-Attacks Against Critical Infrastructure,” Security Council Report, 25 August 2020, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2020/08/arria-formula-meeting-on-cyber-attacks-against-critical-infrastructure.php>.

and call for an international response to the COVID-19 situation. A major concern has been that the uneven distribution of equipment can create civil unrest, international conflicts or fuel conspiracy theories and terrorism.

Even though they strongly supported the COVID-19 resolutions, neither Estonia nor Norway has made health security a priority for their term on the Council

There is currently a potential for small states to exploit the momentum and build further on this development. But even though they strongly supported the COVID-19 resolutions, neither Estonia nor Norway has made health security a priority for their term on the Council. Questions that remain to be debated for the Security Council are, firstly, to what extent can the Security Council be strengthened and better equipped to address situations where health can constitute real and serious threats against international peace and security? And secondly, to what extent can the Security Council contribute to prevent and reduce conflicts by adopting resolutions on ceasefires, solidarity and vaccine distribution? Furthermore, it is also important to gain a better understanding about what role the Security Council should play in questions concerning global health and security. What are the interfaces between the Security Council and other organisations such as the WHO and COVAX? And how do health and security situations relate to the Security Council mandate?

The recent experiences of both Estonia and Norway tend to confirm the value of diplomatic experience, reputation-building and to some extent also the ability to assume ownership of matters on the UNSC agenda

CONCLUSIONS

Estonia and Norway are both relatively small states. Without international organisations and multilateralism, they would arguably have limited influence on world politics. Structured global cooperation is therefore a logical and important common goal for these states. While studies find that the opportunities for small states to substantially influence the UNSC agenda during their time as elected members are relatively limited, this does not mean that their time on the UNSC is without effect.

While states themselves claim that strengthened diplomatic networks and status are not chief motivations for seeking UNSC membership, these do seem to be important outcomes. The recent experiences of both Estonia and Norway tend to confirm the value of diplomatic experience, reputation-building and to some extent also the ability to assume ownership of matters on the UNSC agenda. As in any diplomatic setting, knowing

Norway seems to have deeply internalised the belief in the value of structured multilateral cooperation for small states and the contribution that an active role in such cooperation can make to national security

how to “play the game” is key to the ability of small states to make the most of their UNSC membership and to punch above their weight. In this report, we have identified four specific methods through which elected members, and especially smaller states, work to influence the UNSC agenda. They include: (i) coalition-building, (ii) actively using the presidency function, (iii) organising special events, and (iv) assuming the penholder role.

Looking at the approaches of Estonia and Norway in 2021, some notable and interesting national differences can also be identified. Firstly, the two states assess *the relative importance of the UN* differently. In Norway’s foreign policy, there is a strong tradition of prioritising the UN. Norway seems to have deeply internalised the belief in the

value of structured multilateral cooperation for small states and the contribution that an active role in such cooperation (no matter what its limitations) can make to national security. By contrast, for Estonia, the UN has not been a foreign policy priority in the past, and its contribution to national security continues to be seen as secondary to membership in Western organisations, notably NATO and the EU.

Secondly, there are important differences between the two countries' *international profiles and diplomatic styles*. Norway's priorities in the Security Council seem to reflect its long experience and its wish to maintain its reputation as a constructive

Estonia has not shied away from difficult and controversial topics or from taking the initiative to introduce new working methods and new topics to the Security Council agenda

contributor to multilateral cooperation and peacebuilding. Meanwhile, Estonia has taken a rather bold approach as a newcomer. It has not shied away from difficult and controversial topics or from taking the initiative to introduce new working methods and new topics to the Security Council agenda, with the aim to open up new Security Council portfolios.

Thirdly, and as an extension of the two first points, Norway tends to focus on softer *topics* (such as women's rights and climate security) and tries to use the UN to shape

While Estonia has tried to visibly promote its priorities, such as the cybersecurity agenda, Norway has chosen a more subtle approach, working the diplomatic relations to make smaller and less visible breakthroughs in ongoing Council processes

the international agenda and norms to make them more favourable to smaller states. In this way, it may indirectly strengthen national security via the UN. Estonia also places a strong emphasis on international norms, but its focus has rather been on conflictual issues (such as Ukraine and Belarus) where profound disagreements between major powers are

likely to persist. Estonia's way to try to use the UN to the advantage of national security has been to tackle such issues and use the UN as an arena to promote its positions and to strengthen coalitions with like-minded countries. While Estonia has tried to visibly promote its priorities, such as the cybersecurity agenda, Norway has chosen a more subtle approach, working the diplomatic relations to make smaller and less visible breakthroughs in ongoing Council processes. For smaller states, it may take time to observe the impact of efforts: Raising the general awareness of an issue may impact the discourse in the longer term, eventually pushing the issue up on the UNSC agenda and shaping "the bandwidth of possible outcomes".⁶⁴

In spite of the differences, cooperation between Estonia and Norway as elected members of the UNSC has brought some important results, most notably through the shared penholdership of the Afghanistan file that brought the two countries to the centre stage of global diplomacy. The experiences of Estonian-Norwegian and more broadly Nordic-Baltic cooperation suggest that there may be scope for further strengthening Nordic-Baltic cooperation in the framework of UN structures, where coalition-building has been an important strategic tool for small states.

⁶⁴ Kevin C. Dunn and Iver B. Neumann, *Undertaking Discourse Analysis for Social Research* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 4.

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