

Nov 04, 2016 by [Caitlin Byrne](#)

In pursuit of a seat on the UN Security Council: Lessons from the Tour de France ^[1]

Australian diplomats and policy-makers were no doubt watching as Australian cyclist, Cadel Evans edged past Luxembourg rival Andy Schleck to win the prestigious Tour de France earlier this week. They may well hope for a repeat performance when Australia faces Finland and Luxembourg next October in the contest for one of the two available seats on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). As with Evans' arduous push through France with team mates and support crew in the background, Australia's campaign for a position on the UNSC while spearheaded by diplomats in New York, should be supported by a wider platform of public diplomacy effort to promote Australia as a capable, responsible active member of the world community.

Indeed, Australia's diplomats might reflect on Evans' journey to success and perhaps find some lessons that could well apply to the UNSC race. His is a 20 year journey that encompasses past defeats overcome by strategic purpose, focus and persistence; underpinned by an expert team and sustained by a broad-based public network of support. Furthermore, while the Tour de France itself is a contest surrounded by mesmerizing marketing and hype, it clear from watching each painstaking day that image alone while necessary for such a competition, will not deliver success. The Tour de France is by its nature a contest that is fought on the consistent performance, skill and resilience of its competitors. Lastly, for Evans the win in France signals a career peak, but hopefully not the end of the road.

Australia last occupied a place on the UNSC in 1985-86. Withdrawing from a campaign in 2003, its most recent complete campaign experience took place in 1996. That campaign, very much based in traditional diplomatic practice, ended in bitter disappointment as diplomatic pledges of support for the Australian bid simply dissipated through the secret ballot process. Fifteen years on and many diplomats still consider the UNSC campaign to be one that rests exclusively within the domain of their profession, to be guarded closely from outside input or influence. However, the recent experiences of others including Ireland's election to the UNSC in 2000 and Canada's defeat in 2010, suggest otherwise. Election to the UNSC guided by Article 23(1) of the UN Charter turns upon the dual notions of international reputation and image, the very currencies of soft power, and as such is connected to the influences, interests and expectations of a wider international public. Indeed, as with most foreign policy goals, success in the UNSC depends on the ability of a state to influence its external environment in order to secure support for its international reputation, interests and values. That is the essence of public diplomacy.

For nations like Australia, consistent policy delivery, both in the international and domestic arenas sits inevitably at the core of its reputation, and its campaign. Strong policy is a fundamental platform from which a nation's reputation is communicated and understood. Nothing speaks more clearly to the identity, values and intent of a nation than its actions and performance in this space. Australia's efforts early in the campaign on climate change through

the signing of the Kyoto Protocol, improving Indigenous outcomes through the national apology, and commitment to the Millennium Development Goals by bringing its projected development assistance contributions to 0.5% of Gross National Income (GNI) by 2015 have all reflected well upon Australia's international standing.

More recent efforts to deliver a price on carbon, secure animal welfare outcomes in live cattle trade and build a regional solution to people smuggling and refugee processing have not been as easy to resolve, and may continue to attract criticism. These issues will continue to test the policy development, engagement and advocacy skills of the current government, and will be watched in the context of the candidacy. Looking to key challenges ahead, Australia's response to Palestine's forthcoming bid to upgrade its status at the UN, both through formal diplomatic channels, but also through wider public (domestic and international) networks will also form part of the broad policy narrative of this UNSC candidate.

These are issues of intense domestic and regional interest to which public audiences both international and domestic are deeply connected and on which they will have input and wield influence. So, eyes on the road for there may be bumps, difficult climbs and lonely stretches ahead. Practitioners who fail to acknowledge the relevance of public diplomacy initiatives that capture and harness wider public interests, underestimate the nature of the campaign, but also the soft power opportunities and benefits that might be realized on the campaign road and beyond.
