



PISM | POLSKI INSTYTUT SPRAW MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH  
THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

# BULLETIN

No. 63 (1134), 30 April 2018 © PISM

Editors: Sławomir Dębski ● Bartosz Wiśniewski ● Rafał Tarnogórski

Karolina Borońska-Hryniewiecka ● Anna Maria Dyer ● Aleksandra Gawlikowska-Fyk  
Sebastian Płóciennik ● Patrycja Sasnal ● Justyna Szczudlik ● Marcin Terlikowski ● Tomasz Żornaczuk

## Poland's Turn: Lessons Learnt from the Kazakhstan, Kuwait and Netherlands Presidencies of the UNSC

Szymon Zaręba

*The last three presidencies of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) demonstrate that success depends on the ability of the chairing state's diplomacy to respond effectively to the challenges to international peace and security. The experience of the states that have recently presided over the UNSC will encourage Poland to seek innovative ways to popularise the issues before the council, including those it wants to bring to the fore. At the same time, this experience induces Poland to identify areas in which it can possibly introduce new practices and leave its mark.*

In May 2018, Poland will take over the presidency of the UNSC. Three non-permanent members have already completed their presidencies this year, Kazakhstan in January, Kuwait in February, and the Netherlands in March.

**The Role of Leadership.** The UNSC presidency is rotational, transferring from state to state each month in alphabetical order (English). It includes both purely procedural obligations, such as convening meetings, inviting states or guests from outside the council, or setting the agenda. It also entails diplomatic engagement, including exercising a mediation function and making efforts to achieve consensus on specific issues discussed in the council.

For the state that holds the presidency, it has the opportunity to highlight the state's role in the UN system. It also gives the state real influence on shaping the council's agenda and enables it to emphasise issues the state considers particularly important. It also contributes to improving the negotiating position of the state outside the UN.

**The Last Three Presidencies.** Kazakhstan's presidency in January was the first in both the country's history and that of Central Asia. The premier event was a high-level meeting on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and confidence-building measures with the participation of two presidents and several foreign ministers from Security Council states. Of great significance also was a meeting devoted to the announcement of the draft Code of Conduct for the Achievement of a Terrorism-Free World and a debate on building a regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia. In addition, at Kazakhstan's initiative, a multi-day visit by the UNSC to Afghanistan took place, as well as the first official ceremony inaugurating the 2018–2019 term of the five elected non-permanent council members. The events devoted to Central Asia and Afghanistan and the symbolic inauguration ceremony were most often indicated in statements by the representatives of other UNSC countries praising the Kazakh presidency.

Kuwait took up the presidency next, the second time in its history and the first after almost 40 years (1979). The Kuwaitis set as their main objective emphasising the importance of the goals and principles of the United Nations Charter for maintaining international peace and security. They devoted to this issue an event at the ministerial level. They also organised an open debate concerning the possibility of increasing the effectiveness of the Security Council, which was attended by almost 60 countries, as well as an informal

session dedicated to Palestine, focused on the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. In addition, together with the EU, Kuwait co-organised a successful conference, during which about \$30 billion were pledged for the reconstruction of Iraq after the fall of the so-called Islamic State. Kuwait won praise from the EU and the Arab states. However, it also had obstacles, finding it was not possible to organise a working visit to Myanmar, which rejected the proposed date. Widely recognised as a great success was the unanimous acceptance of Resolution 2401, put forward by Kuwait and Sweden, establishing a 30-day ceasefire in Syria to allow the provision of humanitarian aid. This was achieved despite an initial threat of a Russian veto, thanks to the postponement of the vote and diplomatic efforts by both sponsors of the resolution. Their professional and balanced approach was later noted as appreciated by representatives of, among others, France, Germany, and the EU.

In March 2018, 18 years after its last presidency, the Netherlands took over the UNSC presidency, the seventh time in its history. The Dutch planned as many as five major events for the month, including two open debates, one on reform of UN peacekeeping missions and the other on the role of women in maintaining international peace and security in the context of the UN mission to Afghanistan, as well as three briefings devoted to the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the impact of climate change on water resources, using Lake Chad as a case study, and the problem of hunger in armed conflict. Some of the countries in the UNSC were sceptical of the idea of discussing hunger in an abstract way, in isolation from the context of a country or region. Despite its ambitious scale, the programme did not trigger a lively response far beyond the UNSC. Much more attention was paid to attempts to ensure the effectiveness of the February resolution regarding a truce in Syria, initiated by other council members. The attention of media was drawn to two side events: a symbolic ceremony of handing a tree to the Secretary-General on the International Day of Forests and a spectacular virtual presentation showing the water level flooding the UN headquarters in New York if climate change is not stopped.

**Conclusions.** The last three presidencies of the UNSC shows that important global problems already included in the programme are better discussed when focused on a specific region, especially one closer to the state holding the presidency. At the same time, it is not worth overloading the Council's agenda with planned events, as the Netherlands did. A more balanced approach will leave time and resources available to respond quickly and effectively to pressing challenges. Ultimately, it is the achievements in this area, especially when tied to the adoption of a resolution, that gain the greatest approval from the global public, media, and other countries. The success of a presidency on pressing matters is usually assessed in the short term and largely in isolation from the difficulty in implementing the provisions of a resolution.

Holding the presidency is also easier when scenarios envisioning the conduct and draft positions on potential sources of tension or conflict present on the UNSC agenda are prepared in advance. During the Polish presidency, aggravation of conflict is highly probable, especially in the case of Syria because of the ongoing war there, as well as in the Israeli-Palestinian issue, mainly in connection with the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the state of Israel and the decision by the U.S. to transfer its embassy to Jerusalem in May, the Iran matter with the U.S. administration possibly announcing in mid-May its withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear agreement, and the Korean Peninsula, given the ongoing tension there and planned meeting between the U.S. president with the leader of North Korea. In situations requiring intensive diplomatic efforts within a short period, it is necessary to cooperate with partners on the council who are willing to help the presidency persuade other UNSC states to accept a solution. An example of this was the cooperation between Kuwait and Sweden, one of the noticeably active non-permanent members of the council. It also should be noted that submitting a motion to vote on one's own resolution only makes sense when the distribution of votes is clear. Using the example of Resolution 2401, it is useful to dispel the doubts of the partners beforehand. Of course, forcing a permanent member of the UNSC to choose whether to veto a resolution supported by the other members of the council may bring some immediate political benefits, too. The non-permanent members of the council who hold the presidency, however, try to avoid such steps, seeking instead to build consensus.

It is also important for the effectiveness of the presidency to adequately communicate one's own position and intentions. This requires as comprehensive and precise presentation of them as possible, using various communication channels, including social media and other online resources. It also involves the need to try to explain how the presidency's proposals stand out from other ones often already or repeatedly discussed in the council.