

Australia's activist foreign policy, North Africa and the United Nations Security Council: The role of a 'creative middle power' in the international sphere

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Abstract

Australia's historic win of a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council 2013-2015 represents an increasingly activist approach to foreign policy formulation taken by the post-Howard Labor governments under Prime Ministers Kevin Rudd and, later, Julia Gillard, based on a recognition that 'the UNSC in the immediate period ahead, is directly relevant to a number of core Australian national security interests'.¹ This Labor-specific approach holds an activist foreign policy as being in the best national interest and, in turn, echoes Rudd's personal belief as Australian Foreign Minister, that 'as a creative middle-power Australia could – and indeed had a responsibility to – play a role in important global events, even those happening far from Australia's region'.² This belief extends to the Arab states of North Africa, where Rudd has made it clear that 'Australia will not abandon those who strive for peace and freedom'.³

Introduction

When it was announced on October 19th 2012 that Australia had been successful in its bid for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council 2013-2015, it was the culmination of a five-year diplomatic campaign that saw Australia invest time, money and effort in its desire to play a role in the formulation of global policy in the world's key multilateral institution. This historic win, the fifth time that Australia has served as a member and the fourth time under a Labor government, represents an increasingly activist approach to foreign policy formulation taken by the post-Howard Labor governments under Prime Ministers Kevin Rudd and, later, Julia Gillard, based on a recognition that 'the UNSC in the immediate period ahead, is directly relevant to a number of core Australian national security interests'.⁴

This Labor-specific approach holds an activist foreign policy as being in the best national interest and, in turn, echoes Rudd's personal belief as Australian Foreign Minister, that 'as a creative middle-power Australia could – and indeed had a responsibility to – play a role in important global events, even those happening far from Australia's region'.⁵ This belief

¹ Kevin Rudd, 'Australia's foreign policy priorities and our candidature for the UN Security Council', Speech to the National Press Club, Canberra, June 1st 2011, accessed October 3rd 2012.

² 'Rudd was a good, activist foreign minister', The Financial Review, February 22nd 2012, accessed October 29th 2012.

³ Kevin Rudd, 'Australia serving peace and freedom in North Africa', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Media Release, December 8th 2011, accessed October 9th 2012.

⁴ Kevin Rudd, 'Australia's foreign policy priorities and our candidature for the UN Security Council', Speech to the National Press Club, Canberra, June 1st 2011, accessed October 3rd 2012.

⁵ 'Rudd was a good, activist foreign minister', The Financial Review, February 22nd 2012, accessed October 29th 2012.

extends to the Arab states of North Africa, where Rudd has made it clear that 'Australia will not abandon those who strive for peace and freedom'.⁶

Beginning in 2010 in Tunisia, a state previously assumed to be comparatively stable, and then spreading quickly throughout the MENA region and some states of sub-Saharan Africa, protesters came out in full force against long-standing autocratic governments, demanding political change. These Arab Spring revolutions and revolts swept through the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in late 2010/2011, resulting in regime changes, constitutional reforms and parliamentary elections in multiple states, with the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security section of the Australian Parliament noting that 'economic crises [such as the global financial crisis] act as a catalyst to political change'.⁷ Across the region the common concerns voiced by the protesters included, but were not limited to, governmental corruption (often bleeding in to the state military apparatus), uneven distribution of wealth and power, and long-term human rights violations, exacerbated by demographic issues such as rising levels of youth unemployment despite access to higher education increasing, all within the context of increased (and often unchecked) urbanisation.

Prior to the multidimensional activist approach to foreign policy taken by the Labor government, the Liberal Howard government relied predominantly on trade as a basis for interaction with regions such as North Africa that were deemed either too geographically distant, too culturally different, too politically unstable or too strategically unimportant to develop a layered relationship with. This was seen to be in the best interests of 'developing' regions such as North Africa, with this 'economic functionalism' acting as a continuation of the Liberal government's materialist tradition whereby 'economic reform is seen as the best engine of political freedoms and security'.⁸

However, despite the varying ideologies behind the foreign policy approaches of successive Australian governments, there has been ongoing bipartisan recognition of two points. Firstly, that as a comfortable middle power with a relatively stable resource-dependent economy, Australia needs to constantly rethink and redefine its role on the international stage (seen in the successful campaign for a seat on the United Nations Security Council).⁹ And secondly, Australia needs to recognise the growing significance of North Africa, especially in lieu of the recent Arab Spring revolutions.¹⁰

To date, of the five Arab states generally agreed upon to make up North Africa - Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, (although the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) amended the definition in 2011 to also include Sudan, South Sudan and Western

⁶ Kevin Rudd, 'Australia serving peace and freedom in North Africa', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Media Release, December 8th 2011, accessed October 9th 2012.

⁷ Jeffrey Robertson, 'Lessons in Political Change in North Africa', Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security Section, Parliamentary Library, Research Paper No. 15, 2010-2011.

⁸ Benjamin MacQueen, in Fethi Mansouri (ed.), 'Australia and the Middle East: A Frontline Relationship', London: Tauris and New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2006, pp 155.

⁹ 'Australia secures a seat on the United Nations Security Council', Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Media Release, October 19th 2012, accessed October 31st 2012.

¹⁰ 'Advancing the National Interest', Australian Government, Defence White Paper, 12th February 2003, accessed October 20th 2012, pp xviii.

Sahara for the purpose of trade statistics),¹¹ three governments have been overthrown in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, with varying levels of accompanying violence. Perhaps to stave off such violence a new constitution and parliamentary elections were held in Morocco and parliamentary elections have been held in Algeria, albeit with poor voter turnout and unsupported by any real systematic change. While North Africa makes up just a fraction of the continent's 55 states, nine territories and three de facto states with limited recognition, as a region it is often treated as irrevocably connected with its southern counterparts, and yet this is the region that is also included in the broader heading of 'Middle East' and 'Arab World'. This academic limbo is due in part to the fact that many of the North African states are simultaneously members of the African Union, League of Arab States, and Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).

Here, Australia's increasing re-engagement of Africa was inadvertently timed to encompass a rapidly changing North Africa. At the National Press Club in June 2011 then-Foreign Minister Rudd argued that 'Australian interests and values have also been seized by recent developments in the Middle East. Australia's view is straight forward: we have a deep interest in the success of the democratic project in the Arab world'.¹² Motivated by Australia's new activist foreign policy approach, Rudd was one of the first international supporters of the rebel movement in Libya, reflecting a personal belief in the effectiveness of 'creative middle power diplomacy,'¹³ a phrase he uses frequently in speeches and official government media releases, as well as a modern interpretation of an ongoing Labor commitment to proactive dealings with the international sphere, where 'we always seek to be actors rather than informed bystanders in the unfolding events of our region and the world at large'.¹⁴

Recent White Papers published by the Australian government – 'Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030' (2009) and 'Australia in the Asian Century' (2012) – reflect an overwhelming emphasis on the immediate Asia Pacific area, as 'our prosperity and security are intertwined with our region, and have shifted diplomatic resources appropriately'.¹⁵ However, it should be noted that an increased, and reasonable, engagement with the states of the Asia Pacific does not preclude an improved and active relationship with North Africa, and that despite concentrating on the Asia Pacific, these government papers still acknowledge the fact that 'regional conflicts, such as in the Middle East and Africa, will likely continue to be a risk in the international system'.¹⁶ This augmented a warning that 'the political, social and economic problems faced by these states

¹¹ 'Composition of Trade 2011', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, July 2012, accessed October 10th 2012.

¹² Kevin Rudd, 'Australia's foreign policy priorities and our candidature for the UN Security Council'.

¹³ Kevin Rudd, 'Speech to mark the opening of Australia's Embassy in Addis Ababa', Department of Foreign Affairs, speech given at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, January 26th 2011 accessed September 6th 2012.

¹⁴ Kevin Rudd, 'Australia's foreign policy priorities and our candidature for the UN Security Council'.

¹⁵ 'Australia in the Asian Century', Australian Government, Defence White Paper, October 28th 2012, accessed October 29th 2012, pp 253.

¹⁶ 'Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030', Australian Government, Defence White Paper, May 2nd 2009, accessed October 1st 2012, pp 30.

are symptomatic of factors that often give rise to crucial global security concerns¹⁷ – a prediction that was to prove startlingly accurate in North Africa in 2010.

The current state of the Australian economy

At the time of writing, Australia had the 12th-largest economy in the world – a change since 2007 as, according to Treasurer Wayne Swan, Australia has ‘surpassed the economies of South Korea, Mexico and now Spain’.¹⁸ Despite the ‘global turbulence’¹⁹ of the global financial crisis, Australian resource exports tripled.²⁰ Then, as now, resources and primary products continue to be Australia’s strongest export, both for the MENA region and overall.²¹

It is important to note at this point that most trade-related documents that include statistics on North Africa, either count as part of Africa or the Middle East (reflecting North Africa’s position in academic limbo), or else have varying definitions of North Africa (the original five Arab states, the original five Arab states plus Sudan, South Sudan and the Western Sahara, or the original five Arab States minus Egypt). It will be explained in-text what each statistic includes geographically, as different publications will be relying on different definitions. This lack of clear focus, however, does make analysis difficult.

Over the time of the Arab Spring (ongoing in the MENA region although violence seems to have lessened in the North African states) the Australian trade balance was in a surplus (with the sole exception of February 2011) — ‘a solid performance in the face of continuing global economic uncertainty’²²—until February 2012 when the Australian trade balance fell back into a deficit. The latest DFAT Composition of Trade (2011) Trade Overview stated that Australia recorded a surplus of \$18.3b, rising \$3.1b on the surplus of \$15.2b recorded in 2010.²³ According to this Composition of Trade, trade with Africa (including North Africa) now reflects Australia’s overall growth in trade.

Trade with the African continent

Much of the data available is focused on Australia’s trade with the entire continent of Africa – this either proceeds on the assumption that Africa exists as one unified, homogenous state or concentrates predominantly on sub-Saharan Africa at the expense of North Africa. Economic ties with North Africa, subsumed as they are under the heading of ‘national interest’, remain one of the primary influences on Australian policymakers – the pro-democracy demands of the Arab Spring protesters in North Africa may very well lead to

¹⁷ Benjamin MacQueen, in Fethi Mansouri (ed.), ‘Australia and the Middle East: A Frontline Relationship’, pp 164.

¹⁸ Simon Cullen, ‘Australia now world’s 12th-largest economy’, ABC News, October 9th 2012, accessed October 9th 2012.

¹⁹ ‘Australia’s trade expands in face of global turbulence’, Media release from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, August 28th 2012, accessed September 20th 2012.

²⁰ ‘Australian exports surge to new record’, Media release from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, July 11th 2012, accessed September 20th 2012.

²¹ ‘Composition of Trade 2011’, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, pp 90.

²² ‘Australia records its ninth consecutive trade surplus in November 2011’, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Media Release, 5th January 2012, accessed 20th September 2012.

²³ ‘Composition of Trade 2011’, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, pp 1.

more accessible markets for Australian goods and services as new, democratically elected governments endeavour to meet the economic challenges of rebuilding in a new, globalised world.

The growth of Australia's total trade with Africa (including the five Arab states of North Africa) outclasses global levels of growth, both in the percentage of growth experiences 2010-2011 (18.8% for Africa, compared to the 9.9% predicted growth for overall trade), and the prediction of growth over the next five years (6.9% for Africa versus 6.4% globally).²⁴

According to recent statistics from the latest White Paper, 'Africa and the Middle East' is predicted to provide the second largest growing consumer market for Australian goods and services, with an increase of 148.9% between 2009 and 2030. This is behind the Asia Pacific region, which is predicted to grow by a whopping 514.86%, and ahead of South America (with a 72.93% increase) and Europe (with a 2.4% increase). North America, conversely, is predicted to decrease by 4.73%.²⁵

Trade with the Arab states of North Africa

The 2010 DFAT publication 'Australia's Trade with Africa and the Middle East' excludes Egypt from their definition of North Africa, leaving it as the four Arab states of Algeria, Libya, Tunisia and Morocco. However, relevant statistics from Egypt will be included in certain sections for purposes of easier conversation and a more accurate analysis.

For Australia, Africa only accounts for 2.9% of both overall imports and exports. Australia's total trade in goods and services with Africa (including Egypt) increased 32.6% to \$8.5b in 2010, a strong recovery from the fall of 24.3% the previous year.²⁶ Importantly, this increase happened at the beginning of the Arab Spring – Australia's activist foreign policy being both inspired by and contributing to its strong economic performance and relationship with the North African region. Australia's total merchandise trade with North Africa dropped in 2009, immediately before the Arab Spring revolutions, but recovered in 2010.²⁷ The importance of North Africa to Australia can be seen in the extreme growth experienced in this instance – despite only making up 10.3% of the total African merchandise market, North Africa experienced 88.4% growth in the period just before the Arab Spring (2009-2010) and has a predicted growth spurt of 18.8% over the next five years.²⁸

Primary products are key for both Australia and North Africa and are reflected in the latest Commission of Trade, which reflected an increase of 39.0% in the period 2009-2010 and a predicted growth over the next five years of 6.6%.²⁹

Although not included in the above statistics from North Africa, it is important to mention Australia's total merchandise trade with Egypt. Australia's trade relationship with Egypt looks to remain robust despite recent upheavals, with 11.9% growth in the period 2009-

²⁴ 'Composition of Trade 2011', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, pp 32.

²⁵ 'Australia in the Asian Century', Australian Government, Defence White Paper, pp 63.

²⁶ 'Australia's Trade with Africa and the Middle East', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, November 2010, pp 2.

²⁷ 'Australia's Trade with Africa and the Middle East', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, pp 18.

²⁸ 'Australia's Trade with Africa and the Middle East', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, pp 24.

²⁹ 'Australia's Trade with Africa and the Middle East', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, pp 26.

2010, and a predicted 5.9% growth next five years.³⁰ One area of interest is inorganic chemicals, which grew from \$0 in the period 2007-2010 to \$25,191,000 in 2011.³¹ This is perhaps indicative of a potential area of future growth.

Rudd's activist approach extends to the realm of education, one of Australia's largest individual export items, bringing in \$15.1b in 2011 for Australia and making up 4.8% of total exports despite a \$2.2b decrease since 2009.³² Libya, with its longer and bloodier revolution, benefits most from this, with the Australian government promising to 'assist around 650 Libyan students, and their dependants, who have been left stranded in Australia without funds for study and living costs due to the conflict in their home country'.³³ This was accompanied by a \$1.5m loan to be managed by the Libyan Embassy for the use of Libyan students and their families, indicative of a recognition by Australian policymakers that although help may be offered, it must ultimately be the North African governments themselves that have the final say.³⁴

The Arab Spring and the role of a 'creative middle power' in the international sphere

It is for these reasons that we are seeing Australian policymakers, led by Rudd in various capacities, commit to an increasingly activist foreign policy approach. This partially reflects the attitude of the Labor government, and partially reflects necessity – the extreme events of the Arab Spring and subsequent political reform require Australia to commit to a level of action that it might not otherwise have felt the need to. It was because of this activist emphasis that Rudd was 'among the first world leaders to suggest a no-fly zone and he promoted the idea relentlessly during a frantic two weeks of meetings across the Middle East and Europe'.³⁵

If we look at North Africa specifically we can see that, trade aside, Australia's relations with North Africa have been altered as a result of the Arab Spring. This can be evidenced in the way the Labor government has attempted to extend Australia's relationship with North Africa beyond the purely economic. This promotion of Australia as a capable and effective mediator on the international stage extends to the judicial sphere, where Australia is assisting representatives from both the Libyan government and the International Criminal Council (the ICC) in the facilitation of a smooth and fair trial of Gadhafi family and loyalists via the International Criminal Court (the ICC).³⁶

Equally, Australia's support for democratic and economic development within the Arab states of North Africa doesn't equate to an immediate acceptance of any and all diplomatic choices made, especially when it comes to the rights of Australian citizens overseas. In this way, Australia's activist approach extends to a protection of Australian citizens under the

³⁰ 'Australia's Trade with Africa and the Middle East', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, pp 68.

³¹ 'Composition of Trade 2011', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, pp 183.

³² 'Composition of Trade 2011', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, pp 3.

³³ 'Libyan Students Helped to Keep Studying in Australia', Australian Minister for Trade and Competitiveness, Media Release, September 1st 2011, accessed October 1st 2012.

³⁴ 'Update for Libyan Nationals studying in Australia', Australian Education International, September 5th 2012, accessed November 4th 2012.

³⁵ 'Rudd was a good, activist foreign minister', The Financial Review.

³⁶ 'Melinda Taylor released', Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Media Release, 3rd July 2012, accessed 1st October 2012.

heading of the 'national interest', despite a wish expressed by all governments to foster a healthy, working relationship.

Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr flew to Libya in early July 2012 to secure the release of Australian human rights lawyer Melinda Taylor, arrested in her capacity as Counsel and Deputy Head of the ICC Office of Public Counsel for the Defence (OPCD) after being accused of passing illegal documents to her client.³⁷ This occurred within the context of Australia's ongoing diplomatic involvement with Libya and the wider North African region during the period of the Arab Spring uprisings. Here, Kevin Rudd was instrumental from the beginning in his role as Australian Foreign Minister, calling for military intervention where appropriate and endorsing local protesters, especially during a 'frantic two weeks of meetings across the Middle East and Europe'.³⁸ After securing Ms Taylor's release, Carr thanked Libyan authorities for their support³⁹ and reflected on the tension present in the international sphere regarding the legitimacy of transitional judicial systems that allowed an Australian citizen to be detained.⁴⁰

The flip side of Australia's activist approach to foreign policy can be seen in the case of Australian aid worker Alexandra Bean, who was detained in Libya after refusing to sign a statement in Arabic regarding an incident she had allegedly witnessed. Although she was released in October 2012, statements from Ms Bean's family suggest that their impression was that this only came about due to exposure in the Australian media.⁴¹ One reading of this implies that an activist foreign policy approach leaves Australian policymakers more vulnerable to outside influence than they otherwise might be, with citizens expecting an amplified degree of government involvement in foreign affairs.

Carr later countered public criticism directed at the perceived lack of appropriate governmental and DFAT responses by saying that 'I am offended on behalf of DFAT people... (they) worked very, very hard and the politics of Libya are unsettled and complex, but they were there on the spot within 48 hours and in the meantime had attended to her needs'.⁴² Australia responded quickly to both of these incidents. According to Carr, the distinction between the two cases was that 'Ms Bean lives and works in Libya, she lives and works there, she wasn't a visitor on a humanitarian mission who got arrested and stuck in a prison in Zintan by armed militia like Melinda Taylor'.⁴³ This difference warranted two separate foreign policy approaches, but under the circumstances both were appropriate and, importantly, both were activist in nature.

In this way, Canberra's ability to maintain a healthy working relationship with the governments of North Africa is based partially on the fact that Australia's diplomatic

³⁷ 'Qaddafi ICC defence lawyer held in Zintan with "dangerous" documents', *Libya Herald*.

³⁸ 'Rudd was a good, activist foreign minister', *The Financial Review*.

³⁹ 'Melinda Taylor released', Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Media Release, July 3rd 2012, accessed October 1st 2012.

⁴⁰ 'Release of ICC team in Libya some way off: Australian FM', *Ahram Online*, 24th June 2012, accessed 4th November 2012.

⁴¹ Gemma Jones, 'Freed aid worker Alexandra Bean on way home from Libya', News Limited, October 1st 2012, accessed October 10th 2012.

⁴² Lauren Wilson, 'Bob Carr 'offended' on behalf of DFAT officials by Libya aid worker's complaints', *The Australian*, October 7th 2012, accessed October 10th 2012.

⁴³ Lauren Wilson, 'Bob Carr 'offended' on behalf of DFAT officials by Libya aid worker's complaints'.

presence in the region has steadily improved in recent years as a result of an increasingly activist approach to foreign policy, and partially on a movement to push the relationship between Australia and North Africa beyond merely the economic.

Australia and North Africa as global citizens

The active foreign policy approach of the Labor government can have a positive impact on the cultural relationship between Australia and North Africa, and vice versa. This is despite government documents as recent as the 2012 White Paper 'Australia in the Asian Century' conflating, once again, the Middle East and Africa into one homogenous group – due partially to the fact that this particular government publication concentrates predominantly on the Asia Pacific region, and partially to an ongoing trend by successive Liberal and Labor governments to classify North Africa as part of either Africa or the Middle East. Australia's increasing involvement with Africa as a continent is trade-based, with 'current and prospective investment by Australian resource companies... estimated at USD\$20 billion. Some 200 Australian companies have assets in the ground in Africa, across 41 countries'.⁴⁴ In support of this, the 2011 Joint Standing recommended that DFAT review Australia's diplomatic representation to 'specific African countries, particularly to those with increasing significance to Australia'.⁴⁵ This proposal was made with a view to extending Australia's influence in geographic regions where Australia has not traditionally exerted a huge amount of influence. With the Arab Spring as a catalyst, the aim of Australia's current activist approach to international issues is to extend this relationship with North Africa beyond mere trade concerns.

Current levels of bilateral diplomatic representation

It is important to note that, at the time of writing, the following North African states are represented in Australia – Algeria (The Embassy of People's Democratic Republic of Algeria), Egypt (Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt), Libya (Embassy of Libya), Morocco (Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco), and Tunisia (Embassy of the Republic of Tunisia). This illustrates that, at least diplomatically, Australia occupies an important position when these states are formulating foreign policy, activist or otherwise.

Conversely, the only two North African states with Australian diplomatic representatives in them are Egypt (the Australian Embassy in Cairo, Egypt, which opened in March 1950, the first for Australia in the MENA region, and also has Non Residential Accreditation for Tunisia) and Libya (the Australian Consulate-General in Tripoli, Libya, which reopened in 2004 after an absence of 17 years). Of note, it is the Australian Embassy in France which is responsible for diplomatic relations in Algeria; and the Australian Embassy in Canada which covers Morocco. This reflects the representation of North Africa in the Australian media, which sees Egypt and Libya receive more attention than Morocco, Algeria or Tunisia by dint of economic importance. An increase in attention here may well be indicative of an activist approach but current levels of diplomatic representation seem to be capable of dealing with the level of crises posed by events such as the Arab Spring.

Developing states and Australia's campaign for the United Nations Security Council

⁴⁴ Kevin Rudd, 'Speech at University of Western Australia: Australia's foreign policy looking west'.

⁴⁵ 'Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with the Countries of Africa', Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, pp xxxiii.

Australia's commitment to North Africa beyond the initial Arab Spring period resulted in promises of increased assistance 'to Africa and the Middle East from an estimated \$465 million in 2012-13 to an indicative level of \$625 million in 2015-16',⁴⁶ which may have helped Australia achieve its goal. DFAT claims that any aid money allocated, promised or distributed during this time was incidental to Australia's bid for a seat on the United Nations Security Council, although opposition foreign affairs spokeswoman Julie Bishop claims that 'the coalition will be seeking further detail from the government on the total cost of the bid, and the expectations of countries who gave their support'.⁴⁷ Whether aid money was used or not, the dialogue that has sprung up around the issue is indicative of a wider conversation within the Australian government on the role Australia is playing, or should play, in the international sphere. It is important to remember here that, despite party politics within Australia, there is bipartisan support for the perceived right to promote national views on a global level, with Opposition Leader Tony Abbott saying that 'Australia's voice should be heard because of our values and we should always act in accordance with our values'.⁴⁸

This is relevant not just to Australia's place within the wider international sphere, but to our relationship with North Africa too – the recent Australian White Paper 'Australia in the Asian Century' stated that 'Australia has long been committed to seeking to ensure that regional perspectives are brought to the Council's deliberations. During Australia's 2013-2014 term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council we will continue this commitment'.⁴⁹ This reflects the reasonably high level of support Australia enjoyed from developing states in Africa, the Asia Pacific and the Caribbean during their bid.⁵⁰

In this sense, Australia's increasingly activist foreign policy (whilst not entirely due to Rudd's approach) can be seen in the way that the Labor governments have promoted Australia as a strong and influential (but not threatening) player on the global stage. It is partially for this reason that Australia was successful in its bid for a seat in the United Nations Security Council from 2013-2015, which Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr says 'recognizes Australia's activist foreign policy and status as a good global citizen'.⁵¹

Conclusions

With regards to North Africa, Australia's activist approach to foreign policy dictated that we react quickly to the Arab Spring. As a consequence of this Canberra is well placed to reap the benefits of an active re-engagement, with Rudd stating in 2011 that this is why he has visited the region three times in the last six months and have engaged with the leadership in Egypt, Turkey, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman... that is also why we have decided to actively support the political transformation process and humanitarian crisis in Libya... and in Egypt and Tunisia

⁴⁶ 'Africa and Middle East 2012-2013 Budget', Australian Government AusAID, May 8th 2012, accessed October 11th 2012.

⁴⁷ 'Australia wins seat on UN Security Council', Australia Network News.

⁴⁸ 'PM says UN does matter to Australia', Sky News, October 30th 2012, accessed October 31st 2012.

⁴⁹ 'Australia in the Asian Century', Australian Government, pp 243.

⁵⁰ Cade Mooney, 'Bishop hopes govt upheld nation's values in bid for UN seat', The Observer, October 19th 2012, accessed November 18th 2012.

⁵¹ 'Australia wins seat on UN Security Council', Australia Network News, October 19th 2012, accessed October 29th 2012.

that is why we are providing active economic, urban employment and agricultural systems in order to assist smoothing the political transition process.⁵²

For these reasons Rudd has emphasised that Australia is in North Africa for the long haul – whilst trade and national interest play a huge role in the formulation of foreign policy for Australia, as it does for most states, Australia also has an interest in supporting the growth of democratic states in North Africa –

more than anything, we need to recognise that the transition to democracy is a long-term commitment. A dictatorship can be overthrown in a matter of days or weeks, but building a functioning democracy is a generational challenge. It needs our patience and enduring commitment.⁵³

Australia's activist foreign policy does not negate Australia's 'national interest' – as demonstrated, Australia has an interest in ensuring that North Africa remains stable. This is both for Australia's sake (as revolutions in regions like North Africa have an effect on oil prices, and the tourism and education industries),⁵⁴ and for the sake of the North African people who rose up in support of democracy and freedom of speech. North Africa will remain fragile for quite some time, though the negative effects of this for Australia may be mitigated by the fact that the national economy has emerged from the global financial crisis in a position of strength, ending the 2011-2012 financial year 'with a seasonally-adjusted trade surplus of \$9 million for the month of June and a \$5.8 billion surplus for the year'.⁵⁵ Australia's economic stability during this turbulent period, encompassing not only the Arab Spring but the global financial crisis, may positively affect the economies of North Africa due to increased financial integration in a globalised world and a constant trade relationship. Australia's relationships with its largest two-way trading partners (in descending order, China, Japan and the United States)⁵⁶ should not be adversely impacted by an activist approach to North Africa. The fact that the United States remains such a large political influence on successive Australian governments, Liberal and Labor alike, has not yet presented an issue for policymakers when formulating responses to recent events in North Africa as, according to Carr, 'the Obama administration has been very alive to most of the concerns in foreign policy priorities we've got'.⁵⁷ Consequently, Australia benefits from a strong relationship with a re-elected administration whose priorities (regime change and increased democracy) and activist approach coincides neatly with its own.⁵⁸ Current Labor policymakers have strived to make it clear that Australia is willing to differ from the United States if necessary, with Australia promising to 'speak up for the interests of middle powers and small powers,' including the Arab states of North Africa, whose support helped achieve this position.

⁵² Kevin Rudd, 'Australia's foreign policy priorities and our candidature for the UN Security Council', Speech to the National Press Club, Canberra, June 1st 2011, accessed October 3rd 2012.

⁵³ Kevin Rudd, 'Keep Faith with the Arab Spring', The Australian, May 20th 2011, accessed October 1st 2012.

⁵⁴ Professor Craig McGarty, 'Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with the Countries of Africa', Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, pp 16.

⁵⁵ 'Australia ends financial year with trade surplus', Australian Minister for Trade and Surplus, Media Release, August 12th 2012, accessed October 5th 2012.

⁵⁶ 'Composition of Trade 2011', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, pp 31.

⁵⁷ 'Australia wins seat on UN Security Council', Australia Network News.

⁵⁸ Kevin Rudd, 'Australia's foreign policy priorities and our candidature for the UN Security Council', Speech to the National Press Club.

The three factors identified as driving Australian foreign policy under the Labor government – threats to national security, protection of political sovereignty and ‘coalitions with other states as we seek to build together a global and regional rules-based order that underpins the interests of all states, great and small, including our own’⁵⁹ – support this activist approach. This has long-term consequences for Australia, with support not just being drawn from ‘the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, but AusAID, Defence, and bodies such as the Australian Civil-Military Centre (focused on doctrine development for complex emergencies), business and selected non-government groups’.⁶⁰

Rudd’s dedication to North Africa during this turbulent time was recognised by Abbott, who recognised that ‘it would be churlish of me not to give a special mention to the former prime minister, the former Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd whose original idea and inspiration it was and who did so much so indefatigably to bring it about’.⁶¹ Australia’s activist approach to foreign policy under the Labor government, whilst not new in Australian history, reflects Rudd’s belief that

Africa is a more complex modern reality with a greater range of opportunities than some of the stereotypes of the past would suggest... our interests in the region therefore require an increasingly activist foreign policy.⁶²

This is especially important in regards to Australia’s relationship with the Arab states of North Africa, where the ‘national interest’ remains a top priority for Australian policymakers despite the Arab Spring revolutions acting as a catalyst for a new relationship based on enhanced political and diplomatic engagement, as well as peace and security challenges, with economic concerns underlying the entire exchange.⁶³ Australia’s successful campaign for a seat on the United Nations Security Council, what Carr called a ‘lovely moment’⁶⁴ for a middle power such as Australia, was the result of an increasingly activist approach to foreign policy formulation under the Labor government, and will have long-term effects on the development of relationships, both with North Africa and the wider international sphere.

⁵⁹ Kevin Rudd, ‘Australia’s foreign policy priorities and our candidature for the UN Security Council’.

⁶⁰ Anthony Bergin, ‘UN Security Council – down to work’, Australian Strategic Policy Institute Blog, October 25th 2012, accessed October 29th 2012.

⁶¹ ‘PM says UN does matter to Australia’, Sky News.

⁶² Kevin Rudd, ‘Speech at University of Western Australia: Australia’s foreign policy looking west’.

⁶³ Kevin Rudd, ‘Speech at University of Western Australia: Australia’s foreign policy looking west’.

⁶⁴ ‘Australia wins seat on UN Security Council’, Australia Network News.

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