



YOUTH
NATIONAL
SECURITY
STRATEGY

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INTRODUCTION

Australia confronts a new and compounding set of security challenges. Traditional modes of geopolitics are giving way to sharper styles of statecraft, whether in the form of economic coercion, cyber espionage, disinformation, or the weaponisation of aid and infrastructure. All the while, climate change is stress-testing political systems across the world, in some cases to breaking point. Together, these dynamics amount to a paradigm shift for security planners. Many governments are only just starting to grapple with the new reality.

Unsurprisingly, young people do not have a seat at the table deciding our future. And yet, we're the only generation that will live through the arc of strategic change and the full ramifications of policies put in place today. If things go wrong, we alone pick up the rubble of bad decisions.

Beyond being unjust, though, our absence at the table is a missed opportunity. As a cohort, we benefit from a unique historical perspective. We are, for one, the post-Cold War generation; as digital natives, we have learnt to navigate hyper-connectivity, not walls or blocs. Many of us were born after 9/11, too, spending our childhoods under the shadow of terrorism, not nuclear war. And we have witnessed the wane of our historic ally, in a story punctuated by recessions, populism, and now the pandemic. For all these reasons, our priors are different. And this gives us a fresh lens through which to understand current security challenges and propose novel solutions.

The initiative is founded on this conviction—that young Australians represent an untapped resource when it comes to national security. Our mission, accordingly, is to mobilise their perspective. Many young leaders, we recognise, are already thinking creatively about emerging challenges. We want to elevate their voice in the debate and, ultimately, the sector. Other young Australians have latent potential. They are brimming with ideas, but have never thought of national security as a space that includes them. Our hope is to inspire their participation in the broadening security community; to bring to bear their diverse perspectives and skillsets in solving our nation's next set of challenges.

To achieve this mission, we are running an historic program: The Youth National Security Strategy. The initiative will assemble forty-two of the nation's highest-calibre youth representatives to produce a future-focused national security strategy. The co-authored strategy will give participants a platform to showcase their innovative ideas on emerging threats and how we might overcome them.

The initiative entails more than a document, however; it centres on a week-long symposium at the Australian National University. The symposium will allow the strategy's nationally sourced co-authors to test their ideas and build relationships with leading academics, industry figures, and policymakers in the national security space. The symposium also offers a unique opportunity for sponsors to engage with the next generation of policy leaders, to listen to their ideas, and reach non-traditional audiences.

Ultimately, the initiative promises to sharpen the thinking, skills, and networks of an emerging cohort of young leaders in national security. Crucially, it will also break ground in bringing a diverse and unheard set of voices and ideas to the security sector. As your sponsorship will help enable this important contribution to Australia's national security, we hope you take the opportunity to support this initiative.

**Directors,
Youth National Security Strategy**

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THE EXPERIENCE

As a representative, you will have an unrivalled opportunity to reshape Australia's national security conversation. From September through to December, you will work with a cohort of passionate peers to co-author Australia's first national security strategy in eight years. The document will showcase our generation's innovative views on how we can overcome the next set of strategic challenges.

The process begins in the first week of September, which marks the start of the initiative's digital lead-up. Over this ten-week phase, representatives will be sorted into one of six working groups, which will meet in parallel in weekly videoconferences via zoom. In these meetings, the working groups will discuss and debate Australia's evolving strategic challenges. Discussions will be guided by a moderator and framed by a weekly problem question.

Representatives will examine a broad range of issues across the national security spectrum. They will propose innovative solutions to emerging threats such as disinformation, cyber, public health, and food security. Representatives will also grapple with geostrategic challenges to identify new pathways for Australia in an evolving environment.

Subject-matter experts from across government, industry, and academia will drop in as advisers, giving representatives a chance to test and hone their thinking and engage with leading practitioners.

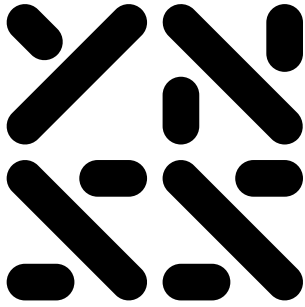
Alongside working group meetings, the lead-up will feature regular digital events, open to the full cohort of representatives. These masterclass-style events will host eminent figures in the national security space in a series of Q&A, panel discussion, and in-conversation formats.

After the lead-up phase, which concludes in early November, representatives will have a month-long break before the symposium. The break is timed to coincide with the exam period of most universities for our representatives who are studying.

After the break, on Sunday the 5th of December, representatives will travel to Canberra to attend the symposium at the Australian National University (December 6–9). Our commitment to fully fund the travel and accommodation of all representatives, particularly for those based interstate, is a top priority. We are on track to deliver on this, and more details about the funding arrangements will be provided to successful applicants upon their selection in mid-August.

At the symposium—the focal point of the experience—representatives will enjoy an exciting line-up of activities and experience policy development first hand. During the day, events will focus on the production of the strategy document. In these moderated, full-group sessions, representatives will finalise the content of the strategy based on the groundwork they will have laid as working groups during the lead-up. In evening sessions, representatives will hear speeches from eminent figures, and have the exciting opportunity to participate in executive coaching events that build their skills, networks, and employment prospects.

At the end of the week, representatives will travel home with sharper skills and ideas and expanded peer and professional networks. They will have made an invaluable contribution to public debate, returning home with an enlivened passion to make a long-term contribution to Australia's national security. This experience will be a major step in the training of Australia's next generation of policy leaders.



THE STRATEGY

The strategy document, set to be published in early 2022, will be the ultimate culmination of the initiative. The forty-two participating representatives will have permanent co-authorship credits on the published strategy, which has the potential to transform Australia's policy debate.

The lead-up will lay the foundations of the strategy's production. After each videoconference meeting, which are framed around weekly problem questions, the working groups will submit a series of bullet points setting out their views on the nature of the given security challenge and recommended policies. By the end of the lead-up, the six working groups will have submitted a comprehensive set of ideas and policy proposals covering the full spectrum of national security issues.

During the month-long break between the lead-up and the symposium, the YNSS team will organise and curate the ideas and proposals submitted over the preceding ten weeks by the working groups. They will identify common themes and divergences, using this information to refine the structure of the day sessions during the symposium.

In these day sessions, representatives will finalise the conceptual content of the strategy document. In moderated, full-group workshops, they will give thought to the document's structure and decide which ideas will appear in the final text. These will be collectively agreed and submitted throughout the four days of the symposium.

Once the symposium concludes, the editing process will begin. The YNSS' team of experienced editors will draft the representatives' ideas into a cohesive text. An editorial charter will prevent editors from injecting their own perspectives, and rounds of review with the representatives will ensure that they consider their ideas faithfully represented in the final text.

The ensuing document — the Youth National Security Strategy — will be published across influential forums. After a launch event, which will bring together the initiative's representatives, hosts, and supporters, the strategy will be presented to news outlets, think tanks, academics, and government. Elevating the voice and profile of the youth representatives will drive the strategy's dissemination.



APPLICATION AND SELECTION

Forty-two young Australians will be selected to participate as representatives in the inaugural Youth National Security Strategy initiative. They will lay the groundwork for the strategy in the initiative's ten-week digital lead-up, attend the symposium at ANU in December, and emerge with co-authorship credits on the ensuing strategy document.

Applications to be a representative will be open until 11:59pm on Wednesday 30 June.

Applications involve submitting a series of 150-word, short-answer responses to the following questions:

1. What is Australia's most significant national security challenge, and why?
2. What is an overlooked security problem that Australia faces? Why and how should we be doing more to deal with it?
3. How would you bring a novel perspective to the national security conversation?
4. Explain how you would make a constructive contribution to group activities and teamwork, including discussions, debates, and co-authorship.
5. Explain how participating in this opportunity would enrich you or advance your aspirations.

Your application will be assessed by a panel of markers, which will award scores to each response based on their quality. All applications will be assessed blind.

Applicants with the highest aggregate scores will be invited to participate in a zoom-based interview round, which will be held in late July.

The interview round will determine the final selection of candidates, who will be advised in mid-August.

To submit an application, please fill out the linked **online form**.

To be eligible for the YNSS applicants must:

- be aged between 18 and 25 years of age before the close of applications on 30 June
- be an Australian citizen or permanent resident
- confirm their availability to attend the December symposium and participate in the symposium's ten-week digital lead-up in order to be considered.



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