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## CANADA AND THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL: THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE WRONG TIME

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**JCSP 45**

**Solo Flight**

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## **CANADA AND THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL: THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE WRONG TIME**

Canada's Liberal government has been striving to bring Canada back into prominence on the world stage by increasing its participation in the United Nations. Aside from short duration United Nations Missions (Mali, and Uganda are notable examples – neither of which were near the top of the United Nations Peace Keeping list), one of the more impactful ways Canada can become involved is by becoming elected to one of the 10 Non-Permanent United Nations Security Council seats. From the Security Council, Canada will have the opportunity to work with the other 14 members to set the United Nations agenda and introduce draft resolutions. These endeavors could forward Canada's larger foreign policy goals of climate change, international security, a rules based global society, human rights, and fair global economic development. However, there are five Permanent members of the Security Council who hold veto votes (China, the United States, Russia, Great Britain, and France). Both China and the United States have demonstrated their willingness to unilaterally punish Canada for un-related diplomatic rows (China effectively imposing economic sanctions, while arbitrarily jailing Canadian citizens over the arrest of Huawei's Chief Financial Officer, while the United States has used bully tactics and imposed tariffs over the renegotiation of the trilateral free trade agreement NAFTA, and perceived Presidential slights). Additionally Canada has found that the other countries will rarely come to her aid when she is embroiled in these diplomatic rows. Canada stands alone.

Ascending onto the Security Council can occur in a couple ways. In some cases (and regions) the members have agreed to rotate the responsibility among member states, however, in the Western Europe and Other Group (WEOG), the regional group Canada belongs to, member states campaign for votes in an election process. The norm for the campaign process (and for

passing draft resolutions for that matter) is often achieved through buying votes, frequently by using the promise of foreign aid, trade deals, favourable lending conditions with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, or even quid pro quo in trading votes on different issues. This is a game Canada has not played in the United Nations since the 90's, and will need to learn again. Canada is inhibited in this by not possessing all the same tools (or to the same degree of influence) as the great powers. In other words, the teams are not even, and not in Canada's favour. Over the last four years Canada has had numerous foreign relations difficulties with both the United States and China, whether it be suffering punishing tariffs at the hands of the United States during the re-negotiation of the NAFTA deal, or having two Canadian citizens arbitrarily imprisoned and the blocking of Canadian Canola seed and pork into China as retaliation to the arrest of Huawei's Chief Financial Officer. Additionally it is possible that the United States had used Canada as an unwitting pawn against China in this matter, as President Donald Trump had said he could intervene with China, if it meant a good trade deal between the United States and China. Furthermore, in the process of campaigning for votes for the United Nations Security Council seat, Canada will likely need to make compromises in parts of its foreign policy to entice votes from other nations. In the political back room of international politics, Canada will need to give something up if it wants to secure all the votes necessary for the election, and once elected Canada will be required to take a stand on policies and resolutions that the Security Council will put forward. This means there is potential to once again run afoul of both the United States and China on their key foreign policy goals, further endangering the Canadian economy. Because of this, Canada should not seek a seat on the United Nations Security Council where its foreign policy agenda would put it direct confrontation with two great powers (and permanent Security Council members) who have demonstrated little issue in punishing Canada over

political and policy disagreements. Instead Canada should concede the Security Council seat to Norway, who is less encumbered by the same diplomatic pressures, but shares similar foreign policy goals. In collaboration with Norway and other European allies, Canada can push its foreign policy agenda without harming itself in the face of more adversarial powers.

Canada has enjoyed a long history within the United Nations, one which has been crowned with service on the United Nations Security Council through every decade since its inception up until 2000 (1947-48, 1958-59, 1967-68, 1977-78, 1989-90, and 1999-2000)<sup>1</sup>. An achievement that can only be matched by a few countries and, as a middle power, Canada had prospered from the economic and political structure established through the Cold War. This tied Canada's future (and fortunes) to a world of increased international cooperation and globalisation, a world that Canada needed to contribute more than its fair share in order to ensure it continues to enjoy the benefits<sup>2</sup>. In order to accomplish this, and ensure its place as a middle power, Canada contributed significant diplomatic, defence, and developmental assistance since the 40's, where it saw its "involvement served a specific purpose: enhance global stability and, by extension, to create opportunities for international economic growth"<sup>3</sup>. But as a middle power, with limited reach and resources, it could not hope to be involved in every international issue; therefore, it had to be judicious in where to spend its political capital in order to create the greatest impact. Contrast to this was the dawn of the 90's, a time where the Canadian government was dealing with national debt issues, resulting in the Department of National Defence budget being reduced by 23% and its total force being reduced by 28,000 down to

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<sup>1</sup> Harald Von Rieknoff. "Canada and the United Nations Security Council, 1999-2000 – A Reassessment" Canadian Foreign Policy Journal 10, no 1, 2011, p71.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Chapnick. "A great small country on the international scene: Looking back at Canada and the United Nations" International Journal 67, no4, Autumn 2012, p1065.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid p1067.

60,000. As a result of the contraction of its budget and personnel, the Canadian Armed Forces also reduced its commitment to the United Nations, dropping to a fifth of its commitment over the decade (from 1,002 personnel in 1990 to 198 in 2002), which saw continued decline into the 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>4</sup>. With this decline, other nations began to fill the void, and Canada began losing the initiative on what had been started 55 years ago, though Canada was not the only country to be distancing itself from the United Nations.

Despite Canada being unable to win an election onto the United Nations Security Council since 2000 (admittedly when Canada did try, it was only a half-hearted attempt by the Harper government in 2010), there are still significant benefits to being one of the 10 elected members, especially when great powers are retreating from the global stage. Out of the 193 nations that make up the United Nations General Assembly, only 15 are able to be a part of the Security Council (five permanent members and 10 elected members - by region). With the Security Council setting the agenda for the United Nations, those 15 members have significant influence over where the United Nations directs its effort and resources, and even the shape of the United Nations itself. It is also on the Security council where countries get an exclusive opportunity to “shape international norms and, in some cases, to advance specific policy objectives” as well as get “direct access to leading representatives of the world’s most powerful states, including China”<sup>5</sup>, which in Canada’s current diplomatic row with China’s largest privately owned company, Huawei, would be quite useful. Additionally, for less developed nations, Security Council seats usually allow access to better terms with the International Monetary Fund and

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Spearin. “Since you left: United Nations peace support, private military and security companies, and Canada” *International Journal* 73, no 1, 2018, p69.

<sup>5</sup> Adam Chapnick. *Canada’s Campaign for a seat on the United Nations Security Council: The Historical Context*” Canadian Global Affairs institute, January 2020, p5.

World Bank, or access to more foreign aid<sup>6</sup>. Being on the Security Council also means being able to contest the great nations and permanent members in order to push for more reforms within the Security Council, or to challenge them on agenda items they have taken the lead for<sup>7</sup>. Therefore being on the Security Council allows individual nations to further their own foreign policy goals and globally highlight its expenditure of its political influence while shaping the global community. With the added access to the permanent members and favourable loans and foreign aid, Security Council seats are a prestigious platform for any nation looking to increase (or maintain) its influence on the world stage. For Canada, being on the Security Council has always meant being at the forefront of the development of the global order and its supporting institutions, most recently (during its 1999-2000 term) Canada was key in better defining and advancing human security issues, and modernised how sanctions worked<sup>8</sup>. The United Nations Security Council is a prestigious and advantageous place for any nation to be, especially if it has aims to maintain (or re-gain) its international clout, and Canada would generally greatly benefit from serving on the council. However, being on the council is not easy and members have to be willing to take a stand on their and other member's policies. Membership also comes with the pitfalls of international politics.

Admittedly (and inadvertently) Canada's action toward universality and multilateralism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has ultimately worked against it in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The United Nations was an important institution for Western allies in the wake of World War II and during the Cold War. During this time, Western allies largely controlled the United Nations through force of numbers,

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<sup>6</sup> Wonjae Hwang, Amanda Sanford, and Junhan Lee. "Does Membership on the UN Security Council Influence Voting in the UN General Assembly?" *International Interactions* 41, 2015, p257.

<sup>7</sup> Ian Martin. "Elected Members of the Security Council: Lane Ducks or Key Players" Brill Nijhoff, 2020, p49.

<sup>8</sup> Harald von Rienkhoff. "Canada and the United Nations Security Council, 1999-2000 – a reassessment" *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 10, no1, 2002, p89.

and the body allowed the United States to maintain "the moral high ground" in diplomatic rows with the Soviet Union. However, as the United Nations expanded its membership, the West began to lose its majority within the body<sup>9</sup>. With an expanded membership, countries within the United Nations General Assembly have banded together, voting as blocs in order to influence the outcome of resolutions, in fact it is "possible for a resolution in the General Assembly to be passed with a two-thirds vote by countries that make up less than 15 percent of the world's population."<sup>10</sup> Therefore in the campaign leading up to the Security Council election, Canada will need to ensure that not only individual countries are appeased, but whole regions. Just like the permanent members of the Security Council using foreign aid and favourable terms with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to secure votes on resolutions, Canada will also need to increase its foreign aid in order to secure the votes it needs for election to the Security Council. In itself increasing foreign aid spending is not a bad thing, however, "a prominent theme in the foreign aid literature is that aid is distributed more in response to strategic concerns than humanitarian needs"<sup>11</sup>. This means Canada will be required to funnel aid into countries that are either not as deserving or that do not correctly align with Canada's foreign aid goals, but are nonetheless needed to secure votes. It is also plausible that Canada will need to treat countries more leniently on behaviours (human rights, women's issues) that do not align with Canadian values or policy in order to secure votes, and one can argue that "contested elections that require

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<sup>9</sup> Adam Chapnick "A great small country on the international scene: Looking back at Canada and the United Nations" *International Journal* 67, no 4, 2012, p1070.

<sup>10</sup> Justin Gruenberg. "An Analysis of United Nations Security Council Resolutions: Are All Countries Treated Equally?" *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 41, no2, 2009, p472.

<sup>11</sup> Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith. "The Pernicious Consequences of the UN Security Council Membership" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54, no 5, 2010, p668.



NATO allies and EU trading partners to make deals with rogue regimes to secure their support are in no WEOG country's interest."<sup>12</sup>

Aside from the campaign process (there is evidence that countries that are aligned with their regional superpower are more likely to win contested elections<sup>13</sup>), it is important to understand how Canada's regional superpower (the United States) both views the United Nations, and treats other members of the Security Council and General Assembly. The United States views the United Nations as a necessary platform to further its own foreign policy goals and to not only solidify their own power within the global order, but also exercise it in a way that is less threatening to other nations. However the United States will not allow the United Nations to gain power over it, which is why we see the United States refusing to submit to International Criminal Court jurisdiction and also withdrawing from past commitments.<sup>14</sup> This is likely to hold true of any great power, as great powers "do not need [international organisations] to achieve specific objectives".<sup>15</sup> The United Nations is useful insofar as it is able to forward their foreign policy goals, or to prevent coalitions to form against their interests. It should then be expected that any dealing with a great power within the context of the United Nations will be favourable only if draft resolutions and mandates have a positive foreign policy effect. Since the election of President Trump in 2016, we have seen a United States that is less willing to challenge Russia and China, resulting in the weakening of human rights language in United Nations' mandates, and the United States reversing support on issues relating to women's rights. Furthermore the

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<sup>12</sup> Adam Chapnick. Canada's Campaign for a seat on the United Nations Security Council: The Historical Context" Canadian Global Affairs institute, January 2020, p5

<sup>13</sup> Axel Dreher, Matthew Gould, Matthew Rablen, and James Raymond Vreeland. "The determinants of election to the United Nations Security Council", Public Choice 158, 2014, p79.

<sup>14</sup> Zaara Zain Hussain. "The Reality of US-UN Relations", International Relations, 2011, p3.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander Thompson. "Coercion Through IOs: The Security Council and the Logic of Information Transmission" International Organization 60, winter 2006, p1.

United States has used the United Nations as less of a body to advance their own policy, but as a stage to set examples of other countries, as recently noted when the US ambassador threatened to “take names” of those who did not support the United States’ move of their embassy to Jerusalem.<sup>16</sup> The United States’ measured withdrawal from the United Nations has left openings for other countries to take advantage of, namely China, who has become more assertive on economic and development issues.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, interaction with the United States within the United Nations has been very transactional, in other words, how will this benefit the United States now, and not along the lines of an ideological, or geopolitical benefit.

Under this new environment, Canada faces some difficult challenges in its interaction with both the United States and China within the United Nations. As the United States’ power and influence declines, they have become “less forgiving of Canadian provocations, and intensified bilateral tensions”.<sup>18</sup> However, China has also been flexing its international muscles and has had little problem with using its growing economic might to bully other nations into doing what it wants. Aside from Canada’s diplomatic issues over the arrest of the Chief Financial Officer of Huawei, resulting in the blocking of canola seed, and pork imports from Canada, Australia has also landed itself under China’s economic sanctions, receiving an 81% tariff on barley imports in response to Australia’s continued push for an independent inquiry into the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic with the World Health Assembly. With the United States and China, the top two economies in the world, entangled in their own trade war, and willing to lash out and penalize allies over foreign policy and economic disagreements, it is clear that

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<sup>16</sup> David Whineray. “The United States’ Current and Future Relationship With The United Nations” United Nations University, 2020, p5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p7.

<sup>18</sup> Brian Bow and Adam Chapnick. “Teaching Canada-US relations: Three great debates” International Journal 71, no2, 2016, p308.

Canada does not need to willingly put itself in between the two warring superpowers where the Canadian economy could be collateral damage. In addition to the economic difficulties that can be imposed upon it by other member states, there is evidence that members of the Security Council demonstrate slower rates of economic growth. Nations outside the Security Council generally enjoy economic growth of 8.7%, whereas nations on the Security Council only grow by 5.2%.<sup>19</sup> However, the dangers of taking on the Security Council seat are not just economic, if Canada does gain a seat on the Security Council, it will be forced to vote on resolutions brought forward to the Security Council. It is here that Canada will be forced “to take public stances on issues that might divide Canada’s allies”,<sup>20</sup> which can further alienate it. Although there is no “good time” to join the Security Council as the world is always fraught with crisis and political upheaval, there are times that are more advantageous than other, but while Canada bides its time, there are other ways to accomplish its foreign policy goals.

Canada in the past has worked outside the Security Council to achieve great things. Before Canada’s 1999-2000 term (which was largely regarded as one of its most successful terms), Canada was able to work outside of the Security Council in 1997 and 1998, and gathered an alliance of like-minded nations and organizations in order to ban landmines through the Anti-Personnel Landmine Ban Treaty (which was signed by 122 countries), and instituted the creation of the International Criminal Court in 1998 (which was initially endorsed by 60 countries, but now has 120 signatories).<sup>21</sup> Canada possesses all the political tools to effectively develop feasible

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<sup>19</sup> Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith. “The Pernicious Consequences of the UN Security Council Membership” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54, no 5, 2010, p674.

<sup>20</sup> Adam Chapnick. *Canada’s Campaign for a seat on the United Nations Security Council: The Historical Context* Canadian Global Affairs institute, January 2020, p3.

<sup>21</sup> Alistair Edgar. “Elected Members of the Security Council: Lame Ducks or Key Players” Brill Nijhoff, 2020, p91.

international policy, enabling it to forward its own foreign policy goals, without the benefit of the Security Council, or the negative aspects that are attached to it.

Despite Canada's long history of engagement within the United Nations, and our stellar track record of serving on the Security Council, a Council seat at this time exposes Canada to too much risk both economically and politically. Although a seat on the Security Council does provide its members with a peerless platform from which to pursue its goals and where it can gain access to the great powers (which would be helpful in the case with the current diplomatic difficulties with China), the current political environment has demonstrated that both the United States and China have little patience for countries that do not follow their foreign policy lead. This will be exacerbated where Canada would be required to take a stand and vote on resolutions, from nuclear disarmament to the United States' Mideast Peace plan, potentially further risking ire from its allies and desired trading partners. Canada will find itself firmly centred between two great powers, with little recourse. Furthermore the sacrifices needed in order to secure the votes in the campaign may not align with Canada's overall political outlook and values, and the evidence lending itself to nations on the Security Council not experiencing the same level of economic growth as non-member nations further weighs against Canada seeking the Council seat in the upcoming election. Ordinarily Canada can, and has, done great things for the global order while on the Security Council; however, this is not the right time for Canada to assert itself on the world stage through this particular mechanism. Canada has other options available to it that carry less risk, and therefore it should cede its position in the upcoming election to Norway, an ally with similar foreign policy goals that is less influenced by the whims of the United States and China.

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