

A Critique of Canada's Loss of the United Nations Security Council Election in 2020

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ABSTRACT

Canada has over the years given herself relevance through her contributions to the United Nations. Canadian internationalism is often defined as enthusiasm for the UN, and support for the organization remains a constant in Canadian foreign policy regardless of the party in power. Canada, additionally, sees working within the UN as consistent with its values. She considers that finding or building consensus and adhering to the rule of law is important to the idea of good international citizenship. This work aims to lay bare the implications of the absence of Canada at the United Nations Security Council.

Keywords: Canada, Generous donor, Initiator, Multilateralism, Peace-monger

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, Canada lost for the second time a bid to become a member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) despite much effort expended in the campaign. Canada from the earliest time and after the Second World War contributed to the formation of the United Nations (UN)—she was present at the 1945 San Francisco Conference and signed the charter that birthed the UN and was chiefly instrumental in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (Wikipedia, 2022). The seat of the Security Council is designed to position Canada on the global stage once more and as well arm her with the posture of being a blessing to the international community.

The international community is desirous of upholding the moral philosophy embedded in international law for the creation of global peace and security. Canada has over time proven to be a foremost bringer and promoter of such global peace and stability in the international society. The place and impact of Canada on the world stage cannot be downplayed in that she has been a quintessence of virtue not just to different international organizations where she belongs, but also to the world at large. However, Canada's recent loss of membership in the UNSC remains an issue bothering the friends of Canada and some other member states of the United Nations. This treatise seeks to solidly substantiate the downside of Canada's absence at the UNSC, which rubs off on other international organizations as well.

CANADA'S ABSENCE AT THE UNSC: A PLUS OR MINUS TO THE UN MEMBER STATES?

The absence of Canada at the UNSC could be seen as a loss of a strong preacher of peace. Canada is widely regarded as a strong peace-monger since the formation of the UN. She had been a preacher and promoter of peace through her peacekeeping ventures and multilateralism. In her work, *Make war, not law? Canada and the challenge of international law in the age of terror*, Stephanie Carvin (2007) observed that Canada in her foreign policy remains mostly ethical, peace-loving, and internationally law-abiding. She also stated that the promotion and advancement of international law and international legal institutions has been an indisputable key in the foreign policy of Ottawa—Canadians strongly prefer policies that promote international law. According to Erika Simpson (1999), "Canada's peacekeeping role through the UN is justifiably a great source of national pride for Canadians." She stressed the manner

in which Canadians view peacekeeping: *“Canadians have always seen peacekeeping as an important part of their identity and of their country’s position on the international stage, even when peacekeeping meant little to much of the international community”* (Simpson, 1999). Owing to the fact that the founding aim of the UN coincides with the foreign policy of Canada, she has repeatedly drummed enormous support for the existence of a solid UN.

Canada’s undying desire for global peace is not just a rhetoric but has been practically proven with the considerable amount of peacekeeping missions she has willingly contributed to through the UN. In the words of Nancy Gordon and Bernard Wood (1992), Canada is the world’s leader in peacekeeping and has continued to contribute to United Nations ventures. Since 1988 Canadians have served with new operations in Afghanistan (UNGOMA), Iran/Iraq (UNIIMOG), Namibia (UNTAG), Central America (ONUCA), El Salvador (ONUSAL), Iraq/Kuwait (UNIKOM), Western Sahara (MINURSO), Cambodia (UNAMIC), and the then Yugoslavia (Gordon & Wood, 1992). In Canada’s bid to ensure global peace, she made decisions aimed at disarmament and arms control to the extent of abating her spending on defense. According to Erika Simpson, Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy’s proposals to eliminate landmines and curtail small arms have earned Canada widespread admiration. Canada had its defense budget decreased from \$12.83 billion in 1991-92 to \$11.97 billion in 1993-94 and \$9.9 billion in 1997-98 (Simpson, 1999). In keeping with the analyses and arguments of this paper, I argue that Canada by dint of all her efforts and informed conduct has marked herself as a model of character with high moral standing in maintaining international law, thus, her absence in the UNSC seemingly creates incompleteness in the decisions of the UNSC in that we could see the towering contributions she made at the time she was a member of the UNSC. As a member of the UNSC at that period, she was armed with enough clout to play such great roles that she did play. But currently lacking membership of the UNSC has restricted her influence over certain intergovernmental organizations like the European Union and as well has curtailed her high sense of onus in playing a “helpful fixer” role for states having mutual hostility like Russia and Ukraine. The existing proofs of her numerous peacekeeping ventures in various regions coupled with the proposals of a Political Science expert to Canada while on the seat of the UNSC previously are illustrative of Canada’s ability to defuse the growing tension between Russia and Ukraine had it been she made it to the UNSC in 2020.

The Political Scientist, Erika Simpson’s proposal to Canada could be summarized like this: Canada’s priority should be not to create new dividing lines. A reformed NATO, which did not aim to include the most powerful country in Europe, Russia, would be fatally flawed. The Canadian government should strive to engage NATO and Russia in an active, cooperative relationship that would form the cornerstone of a new, inclusive security structure in Europe. Canada must act quickly through the UN. Through the auspices of the UN and NATO, Canada should press the allies within NATO to reassure Russia by offering it a special relationship in NATO. Incentives could include formally embedded consultation mechanisms, a mutual non-aggression pledge, and a promise to develop non-offensive defense systems (Simpson, 1999). Granted that Canada had made it to the UNSC, she would certainly and solidly believe it behooves her to develop ideas concerning international security, which would also rub off on other international organizations.

Another angle could be taken as the loss of an initiator. The UN being the mother of all intergovernmental organizations exerts immense influence on all other intergovernmental organizations—decisions from the UNSC (the most powerful organ) affect other intergovernmental organizations, but the absence of Canada at the UNSC has waned the influence she would have had on other international organizations through initiation of ideas and making of proposals.

However, Canada has perennially proven to be a generator of grand ideas. In her previous time in the UNSC, certain affairs of the UN were run on the wheels of the suggestions and ideas she conceived. Nancy Gordon and Bernard Wood captured it in this way; Articles 10 and 12 of the Charter, which allow the General Assembly to intercede to maintain or restore peace when the Security Council cannot act, were the fruits of Canadian proposals. The provisions of Article 27, which require the Security Council to report annually to the General Assembly, and of Article 44, which requires Council consultation with troop-contributing governments to United Nations activities, are other examples of Canadian initiative (Gordon & Wood, 1992). One could say that Canada was the think tank of the UNSC. Nancy Gordon and Bernard Wood further stated that, during the height of Cold War tensions, in September 1983, Allan MacEachen, Canada's secretary of state for external affairs, offered a series of fairly specific suggestions for making the Security Council a more effective body. These included the expanded use by the secretary-general of Article 99 (which allows him to bring to the attention of the Council matters that he considers threats to peace), informal clandestine meetings of the Council to discuss incipient disputes with the secretary-general and additional personnel for the office of the secretary-general to increase his 'fact-finding' competence (Gordon & Wood, 1992). Canada ceaselessly initiated ideas and actions of benefit then, but her current absence from the UNSC is a colossal loss to the UNSC and the UN at large.

Similarly, Erika Simpson succinctly put it into this perspective: "Force is the monopoly of the Great Powers, for all the good it does them. But the Great Powers enjoy no monopoly over ideas. The foreign minister of a small state may not be able to summon a gunboat in aid of his diplomacy, to carry a big stick let alone to brandish it. But he can carry a briefcase well enough, and stock it with proposals" (Simpson, 1999). This goes to say that Canada despite being a middle power does have a lot to contribute to the UNSC through her wealth of ideas if she had made it there.

Canada's absence at the UNSC could be regarded as a loss of a strong voice of multilateralism and a champion of human values. Canada has positioned itself as a foremost defender of human rights. Such has remained a priority in the heart of Canada. Multilateralism on the other hand has lent Canada a voice to achieve her interests. And she has consistently placed massive energy on championing human rights and human security through the rule of law. Stephanie Carvin (2007) commented that it is not surprising that Ottawa has reacted with some unease when confronted with situations that challenge Canada's interests and its commitment to its values, especially the rule of law. The government clearly was not pleased when it was asked by Washington to publicly support the American national missile defense. Additionally, unease over the 1999 Kosovo bombing campaign executed by NATO in the name of human security but lacked prior UN Security Council authorization—prompted Canada to support the establishment of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) to examine the issue of "humanitarian intervention" more systematically, in the hope of finding or developing customary norms (Carvin, 2007). Observing the precepts of the UN remains paramount to Canada other than groveling before a superpower.

Ottawa has shown unprejudiced promotion of democratic etiquette and as well never wavered in the tenets of her foreign policy and upholding of the UN creed. Canada considers that there is no asset in the world as invaluable as fundamental human rights. Nancy Gordon and Bernard Wood observed that a Canadian official in a speech in December 1991, as well as the then Canadian Prime Minister, gave credence to this ideology in his speech at the meeting of Commonwealth heads of government in October 1991 which was recorded thus: *"For Canada...we shall be increasingly channeling our development assistance to those countries that show respect for the fundamental rights and individual freedoms of their people...three themes and priorities for Canadian foreign policy for the coming years: 'strengthening cooperative security, creating sustainable prosperity, and securing democracy and respect for*

human values” (Gordon & Wood, 1992). However, the lack of the presence of Canada in the UNSC could reduce the UN to an everyday talking shop and as well make the UN appear to be a toothless bulldog when the UNSC advocates for multilateralism and admonishes a member state abusive of human rights to desist from such.

The multilateral approach has never ceased to be the therapy of Canada, but her absence in the UNSC could lessen if not erase the observance of multilateralism, because she remains the mightiest voice of multilateralism. According to Nancy Gordon and Bernard Wood, throughout the pre-Gulf War period, that is between August 1990 and January 1991, Canada worked to encourage a multilateral approach and advised against unilateral action by the United States (Gordon & Wood, 1992). The Canadian Prime Minister while addressing the Commons on 29 November 1990 said: *“In the many discussions I have had with President Bush on this subject, I have consistently counseled both restraint in securing Iraq’s withdrawal from Kuwait and the need to work at all times within the authority of the United Nations Charter... Canada, through our distinguished ambassador, Yves Fortier, led the fight in the Security Council to insist that the suggestion by the United States that any concept of unilateral action at that point in time must be resisted... I believe that that action taken by the Government of Canada... resulted in the solidarity we know today. It was consistent with the finest traditions of Canadian diplomacy”* (Gordon & Wood, 1992). Multilateralism has undoubtedly never been a weapon lacking in the arsenal of Canadian diplomacy.

Stephanie Carvin (2007) further stressed that, despite the US President Bush being critical of the Canadian leader who sought for multilateral approach, Ottawa decided not to be supportive of the US-led invasion of Iraq. Canada despite being an ally of the US has also proven to be a thorn in the flesh of the US whenever the US treads on her (Canada’s) values.

It is worthy to note that, it remains true that multilateral institutions and legal forums lend Canada clout and a voice on the international stage that she otherwise might not possess, but her current absence in the UNSC has compressed the voice of multilateralism in the UNSC and other international organizations.

The absence of Canada at the UNSC could be viewed as a loss of a generous donor and motivator. Canada has financially contributed in no small measure to the demands of the UN and has consistently lived up to the financial expectations of the UN. Nancy Gordon and Bernard Wood cited in their work that, Canada was the first country to provide an advance contribution to United Nations Transitional Assistance (UNTAG) in Namibia. On 24 February 1989, to aid in meeting the urgent fiscal need to launch UNTAG, Canada paid \$11.9 million which is nearly eight percent of the budget for UNTAG. Canadian military and civilian peacekeepers also formed a substantial part of the UN effort in Namibia (Gordon & Wood, 1992). Such solidarity with the UN remains second to none.

Canada remains an economic giant in our modern world, but her current absence from the UNSC could dampen her spirit to lend a helping hand financially to the UN when the need arises. In their work, *Canada and the Reshaping of the United Nations*, Nancy Gordon and Bernard Wood narrated how Canada was solidly and tremendously instrumental in the peacekeeping pursuit in Cyprus (UNFICYP) since its inception in 1974. Owing to the fact that a number of states did not contribute to the course of UNFICYP, Canada showed her displeasure, yet contributed more than her fair share to the mission in Cyprus (Gordon & Wood, 1992). Such an act distinguished Canada as an international player without a vested interest in global affairs. Furthermore, Canada has marked herself as a model for emulation and has motivated the UN with the due payment of her bills. The consistency of Ottawa in the payment of her bills and making of donations to the UN needs to be studied and emulated by other member states. Erika Simpson recognized that *“Canada has consistently paid its regular and peacekeeping dues to the UN. It is time to press other member states to enact Article 19 of the UN Charter. This article states that a member which is in arrears for more than two years shall*

be barred from having a vote in the General Assembly” (Simpson, 1999). What is more, no country has beaten this record of unfailing payment of bills set by Canada. By and large, Canada seemingly remains the only country that gives the UN the reason for its continuity of existence. Nancy Gordon and Bernard Wood maintained that Canadian foreign policy has continued to support the United Nations and Canada is one of the few states that pay her bills in full and on time and has consistently contributed to peacekeeping ventures. They further underscored that *“Canada, as always, keeps up to date in its accounts with the United Nations and has urged other states to follow its example”* (Gordon & Wood, 1992). There remains no gainsaying of the fact that Canada has conquered minds through its heart of philanthropy and motivation.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is crystal clear that Canada’s strong voice of multilateralism and financial muscle coupled with her pacifistic ideology as well as birthing of ideas cannot be overlooked in the international community, but her lack of a seat in the UNSC could downsize her benevolence to the UN thereby affecting the financial projects of the UN in various countries. If Canada, with her uncommon experience, history, and credentials made it to the UNSC, there is a high possibility of revitalizing the UN the more. Suffice it to say that Canada’s absence in the UNSC is being felt owing to the uniqueness embedded in her approach to international law and relations with other states. With a network of friends and contacts around the world; a reputation for moderation and tolerance; a knowledgeable, experienced foreign affairs minister; and a good record in the Third World, Canada still wields the right qualifications to be at the UNSC and will perhaps sweep the election next time.

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