

Dept. of Foreign Affairs
Min. des Affaires étrangères

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- to decide, if two or more amendments to a motion or draft resolution are proposed, the order in which they are voted upon (Rule 36);
- to decide whether changes to verbatim records from previous meetings are important enough to be referred to Council before he/she approves them (Rule 52); and
- to refer, unless the Security Council decides otherwise, each application for UN membership to a committee upon which each member of the Security Council is represented (Rule 59).

The President's term lasts one month. If a meeting happens to be in session late in the night on the last day of the month, the President adjourns at midnight, after which the next President convenes another meeting. The rules of procedure allow the President to cede the chair to the member next in alphabetical order if he/she feels a matter being considered by the Council is directly connected to the Member State he/she represents (Rule 20). This rule allows the President to play a more active and partisan role in debate on a particular issue without jeopardizing the impartiality of the presidency.

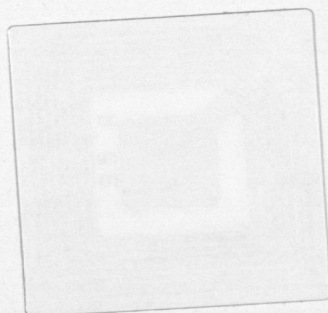
Though the President may cede the presidential chair during debate on a particular issue, the President remains at all times the official representative of the Council. In theory, the provision that the President should represent the corporate will of the Council was intended to give the President the authority required to nominate committees and conclude agreements on the Council's behalf. In practice, however, the provision has been used by the Council to give the President the authority to appeal on its behalf to parties involved in situations of tension or conflict to exercise restraint. It has also enabled the President to submit draft resolutions or decisions to the Council, and to make statements of Council consensus, summaries or decisions to other UN organs or the press.

Beyond Rules of Procedure

There are other procedural functions performed by the President that are not found in the rules of procedure. For instance, the President declares the opening and closing of each meeting, calls for a vote on Council decisions, announces Council decisions, and maintains order and the observance of rules of procedure. However, the President has no express power to call a speaker to order if the speaker wanders from the agenda, repeats what has already been said, or resorts to abusive language.

Sometimes, after the Council has completed considering a matter, the President declares that the Council will keep the item on its agenda. As well, if adopting a certain proposal seems to the President a matter of great urgency, he/she can try informally to limit the number of speeches.

From time to time, the Council decides to give the President other tasks such as to obtain information, designate members of a subsidiary group of the Council, confer with the Secretary-General on their behalf, or follow up on the implementation of resolutions or decisions of the Council. Perhaps the most visible extra duty the President might take on is to meet with the parties to a conflict with the aim of easing tensions.



The Limits of Presidential Influence

Presiding over the Security Council requires a great deal of patience and perseverance. The daunting task of gaining consensus among 15 Council members, each with their own political philosophy and interests to protect, puts special demands on the President. The words of a former president of the Council ring as true today as when spoken in 1979:

I have seen what is beautiful in the work of the Council and what is not. The presidency of the Council is crippling and restrictive and at times generates a sense of loneliness and frustration. Some speakers asked why the Council did not act speedily. That is easier said than done. The work of the Council generates its own momentum. It is wise to move when the time is ripe. I have tried to bridge the gap between views that are poles apart. . . . I was addressed in language that I would not have accepted had I not been restricted by the presidency. . . . Nevertheless, I must stress in the positive sense the spirit of co-operation that I have received from all members. . . . We must strive to place international interests above our narrow national interests if we want to be faithful to the provision of the Charter.

It was with the knowledge of the restrictions placed on the presidency and the limitations of what can be done in a single month that Canada fulfilled its role as President of the Security Council in October of 1989.