

Canada in the United Nations

September 1989

The Security Council

The United Nations Charter confers primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security on the Security Council, thereby granting it a special position of prestige and authority within the complex UN system. Since the founding of the UN, Canada served as a representative on the Security Council approximately once every decade — in 1948-49, 1958-59, 1967-68, 1977-78 and in 1989-90.

Participation on the Council has been viewed as an important multilateral responsibility by successive Canadian governments and it has given Canada an opportunity to contribute directly to the promotion of international peace and security. However, such membership may also incur obligations and political risks. Indeed, governments are often forced to accept a more rapid evolution in their positions on a variety of contentious issues and to take firm public stances on problems which might otherwise not engage their responsibility.

For example, in 1957-58 and 1967-68, the Canadian government voiced considerable reservations about serving on what was perceived to be a deadlocked and ineffective Council. Ultimately, these reservations were overcome because of the realization that a refusal to serve would signify inconsistency in Canada's commitment to the UN.

Canada's Experience on the Security Council

Canada was an active participant in the formation of the United Nations and in the drafting of the Charter. While it reluctantly accepted the need to provide a veto power to the permanent members of the Security Council, it advocated that it be used responsibly and with maximum restraint. In addition, Canada proposed a number of provisions during the drafting of the UN Charter to ensure a viable and important role for small and middle powers. These included articles 10 and 12, which allow the General Assembly to intercede to maintain or restore peace when the Security Council is unable to act, and article 27 paragraph 3, which requires the Security Council to submit annual and, when necessary, special reports to the General Assembly for its consideration. Canada was also active in proposing the language, in article 23 of the Charter, which emphasizes that the primary consideration for membership on the Security Council be the "contribution of members of the UN to the maintenance of peace and security and to the other purposes of the organization ...".

Despite certain limitations, Canada and other non-permanent members have left a distinct imprint on the workings of the Security Council through their active participation in its discussions, sponsorship of resolutions, introduction of procedural innovations and valuable conflict management and mediation functions.

1948-49

During Canada's first term, the question of Palestine, Indonesian independence, the Kashmir dispute and the first Berlin crisis came before the Council.



Canadian Ambassador to the UN William Barton participating in a debate of the Security Council in 1977.
(UN Photo)

The Canadian representative, General A.G.L. McNaughton, intervened constructively on a number of critical occasions during the protracted debates on Indonesian independence and devised the formula which broke the impasse between the Council and the Netherlands, thereby opening the way for a final settlement. Gen. McNaughton was also asked by the Security Council to act as informal mediator of the Kashmir dispute and, in an unusual gesture of confidence, was requested to continue his mediation efforts even after Canada ceased to be a member of the Council.

1958-59

The dominant issue before the Council during Canada's second term was the deteriorating situation in the Middle East which culminated in the military intervention by the United States in Lebanon and the United Kingdom in Jordan. The Security

Dept. of Foreign Affairs
Min. des Affaires étrangères

MAR 16 2010

Return to Departmental Library
Retourner à la Bibliothèque du Ministère