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CANADIAN ATTITUDES AND APPROACHES TO THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

by Harald von Riekhoff

Since the creation of the United Nations, Canada has served on the Security Council with considerable regularity, once every decade. It has held a non-permanent seat for four two-year terms — 1948/49, 1958/59, 1967/68, and 1977/78 — and has recently been elected for the 1989/90 term. Among the non-permanent members, only India and Japan, with six terms each, and Argentina and Brazil, with five completed terms, have had a longer period of service. As Canada embarks on another term of duty, this may be a suitable occasion to recall Canadian attitudes concerning the functions of the Council and its past experiences on the Council, and to comment briefly on the prospects facing Canada during the forthcoming term.

THE SECURITY COUNCIL AND THE UN CHARTER

When the UN Charter was drafted at San Francisco, Canada succeeded in affecting several provisions which define the functions of the Security Council. First and foremost, the Canadian government under Mackenzie King had been determined that the Council should make no decisions on enforcement measures without representation from those countries called upon to contribute to collective security measures. Canada was thus instrumental in the inclusion of Article 44 which gave non-members of the Council the right to "participate in the decisions of the Council concerning the employment of contingents of that member's armed forces."

At the time, this was seen as a major concession to smaller states. However, because the UN has not evolved in the direction of deciding on enforcement measures, Article 44 has become redundant. In contrast, Article 31, which figured much less centrally in the San Francisco deliberations, has become far

more important. It allows non-members of the Security Council, who might otherwise feel disenfranchised, to take part in discussions of the Security Council on matters that directly affect their interests, though not with a right to vote.

On balance, Article 31 has been a mixed blessing and Canada's own attitude toward it is somewhat ambivalent. Although it makes the system of participation somewhat more egalitarian and may, furthermore, bring to bear some particular regional perspective or expertise, it has created certain problems for the functioning of the Council. The number of non-members desiring to address the Council has increased sharply over time. This has frequently overcrowded the Council's agenda; moreover, some of the interventions by non-members are highly rhetorical and emotionally charged, thereby recreating in the Security Council the atmosphere of the General Assembly which is less than ideal for the management and resolution of international conflicts.

Canada influenced two other provisions that deserve mention: one concerns the corresponding security functions of the General Assembly, and the other relates to the "functionalist principle" which gives special recognition to proper qualifications in the election of non-permanent members of the Council. While the Security Council was clearly intended to be the principal UN organ responsible for international peace and security, Articles 10 and 12 vest some parallel responsibilities in the General Assembly. The Security Council was dominated by the five Great Powers which enjoyed permanent membership; the General Assembly could be influenced by the smaller nations.

In addition, recourse could be taken to the General Assembly if the Security Council was unable to discharge its duties. In this spirit, Canada

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voted for the General Assembly Uniting for Peace Resolution [GA Res. 377(V); 3 November 1950] which made provision for emergency action by the General Assembly if the Council was incapacitated by the use of the veto. On a number of occasions Canada has supported the shift of action from the Security Council to the General Assembly when the former had reached an impasse. The most important application of such a transfer occurred during the 1956 Suez war when Lester B. Pearson masterminded a solution to the crisis by proposing that the General Assembly dispatch a UN peacekeeping force to the area. Similar, though less dramatic, shifts from the Security Council to the General Assembly occurred during the 1958 Lebanon crisis, and in the aftermath of the 1967 Middle East war. In the former instance, the General Assembly produced a consensual resolution which linked the withdrawal of US interventionist forces to the strengthening of the contingent of UN observers. In the latter case, the General Assembly was unable to agree on a formula for the withdrawal and disengagement of Israeli forces from occupied areas, and returned the item to the Security Council. Eventually it was the Council which agreed on the pathbreaking Resolution 242 that linked the withdrawal of Israeli forces to a more encompassing security regime based on the respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states of the region.¹

As to the second provision, which concerns the eligibility of non-permanent members to the Security Council, Article 23 of the Charter juxtaposes the qualitative criterion with the principle of equitable regional distribution. In promoting its candidacy for the Council, Canada has emphasized the former, in particular its proven record of international conflict mediation and its major contribution to the creation and operation of UN peacekeeping forces. Relying on such a functionalist interpretation, Canada had originally anticipated something approaching a semi-permanent seat on the Council for itself and other countries in that same category. When the Security Council deliberated in December 1949 whether to extend General McNaughton's role as mediator of the Kashmir dispute after Canadian membership on the Council had ceased, the Soviet permanent representative sarcastically commented that there appeared to be three types of Security Council membership: permanent members, non-permanent ones, and "prolonged" members, a status which Canada appeared to cultivate for itself.

The qualitative criterion, which looks for evidence of a nation's effective contribution to world security, has not been entirely neglected. If it had, Canada would not have served so frequently. On the whole, however, the geographic principle has carried more weight in determining elections to the Council. For one, it is easier to apply than a subjective judgement concerning a nation's potential contribution. Furthermore, the geographic principle has been politically more popular with the Soviet Union, its allies and the non-aligned states. It has clearly been the dominant

criterion since 1957. This has diminished the influence of middle powers in the UN system and, by lowering the probability of their being concurrently represented on the same UN bodies, has also diminished their ability to harmonize policies.

While Canada has regretted this particular trend, one can make a case for the geographic principle, not merely on the basis of equity but also on its potential utility for the functioning of the Security Council. The late John Holmes, a distinguished Canadian diplomat and scholar of international relations, had a penchant for pricking orthodox opinions on Canadian foreign policy. He argued that the Security Council may, without advance warning, be called to deal with disputes in any part of the world, and will thus benefit from members with specific regional expertise. Holmes also noted that, in some circumstances, small powers can be just as constructive to UN diplomacy as middle powers. A Security Council, as initially envisaged by Canadian planners, on which Canada and a few other principal actors would have enjoyed a form of semi-permanent membership might have been less flexible than the one which has evolved.²

GENERAL CANADIAN ATTITUDES AND PRINCIPLES CONCERNING THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Both the Canadian government and the broader public have consistently maintained a favourable image of the UN as an essential instrument of international peace and security. The sharp fluctuations between support and growing hostility toward the UN, which can be witnessed in other countries like the United States, have no counterpart in Canada. The initial illusions soon gave way to more sober expectations and practical considerations. Efforts were mounted to salvage the organization during the Cold War. Preventive diplomacy took the place of the enforcement functions envisaged under the Charter.

One can discern certain general and durable principles which have guided Canadian policy on matters relating to the behaviour of the Security Council. One such general principle is that nations should make the widest possible use of the Security Council to settle international conflicts. While avoiding recourse to the Council for frivolous or purely propagandistic reasons, countries should be encouraged to submit serious disputes to the Council. By providing an official forum for stating their grievances, it may give claimants sufficient excuse not to resort to actions which might threaten international peace and security.

This prevailing principle of maximum use has occasionally been questioned on the basis of more immediate tactical considerations. Thus in 1958, the Department of External Affairs was engaged in an internal debate on the respective merits of involving the Security Council again in the long-standing Kashmir dispute. Chester Ronning, the Canadian High Commissioner to India, argued forcefully

that the use of the Council would not only be fruitless but would undermine the chance of a bilateral settlement between India and Pakistan. "As long as they are engaged in periodic revivals of the debate in the Security Council, they will be more concerned with establishing the righteousness of their case in the eyes of the world than they will be to make some serious progress towards a settlement."³ His counterpart in Pakistan, H.O. Moran, argued from precisely the opposite premise: since the Commonwealth would not deal with the dispute, Pakistan had nowhere else to take the case but to the Security Council. The situation would be aggravated if Pakistan did not have this outlet. Moreover, it would reflect badly on the Security Council to avoid such an important issue. The Department ultimately adopted a position which reflected Moran's view, affirming the principle of maximum use.

Canada acknowledged that regional bodies had a legitimate role in the maintenance of international peace and security. Not being a member of a regional organization itself, Canada viewed their security functions with some reservations. It insisted that, in any conflict of jurisdiction between a regional organization and the Security Council, the latter should exercise predominant responsibility. In line with this principle, the Canadian government vigorously refuted the so-called Lodge Doctrine, the argument propounded by Henry Cabot Lodge, the US Permanent Representative, during the 1954 Guatemala crisis. According to Lodge's interpretation of Article 52 of the Charter, it was mandatory for the Security Council to turn over to the appropriate regional organization any dispute brought to it under Article 35. The Council should avoid further consideration of the dispute while it was being dealt with by the regional body. The Canadian government refused to treat a referral by the Security Council to a regional body as mandatory. It also rejected the idea that the Council was prohibited from acting whenever a matter was under consideration by a regional agency.⁴

On the question of Security Council reform, Canada's position is that making more effective use of the existing instrument is preferable to the more ambitious but elusive goal of a formal revision of the Charter:

The UN can be made more dynamic without rewriting the Charter; its effectiveness and vitality depend not so much upon changing the basic structure of the organization as upon the political resolve of the member states to fulfil the obligations and responsibilities each one has taken up in subscribing to the provisions of the Charter . . . No documentary revision in itself can be a substitution for that will; nor can it be shown that where the will exists the present form of the Charter frustrates it.⁵

At San Francisco, Canada had reluctantly accepted the veto rights of permanent members of the Security Council as a birth defect of the UN, but one which had made the birth possible. Subsequent Canadian policies have not been

directed to the elimination of the veto, a strategy deemed illusory, but to persuading the Great Powers to minimize their use of the veto and, whenever possible, to dilute its consequences when cast. In December 1949, Canada gave the first demonstration of how a Great Power veto could be circumvented. The Soviet Union had vetoed a proposal to maintain the UN Commission on Indonesia after Indonesia had achieved independence. General McNaughton, Canada's Permanent Representative and, at the time, President of the Council, argued that the original mandate of the Commission had been sufficiently broad that it could continue operation despite the Soviet veto.

On a related reform issue concerning the number of members of the Security Council, Canada accepted the 1965 amendment which increased the number of non-permanent members from six to ten. This change was designed to reflect the disproportionate growth of small powers in the overall membership of the UN. But Canada has remained opposed to subsequent proposals to change the composition of the Security Council, arguing that any further expansion would be counterproductive as it would impair the flexibility and rapidity of decision-making. If it were further enlarged, the Security Council would be converted into a mini-General Assembly, upsetting the carefully crafted system of checks and balances among non-aligned, East and Western groups. The Canadian government has let it be known that its own interest in serving on the Council would diminish if membership were to be increased.

THE FUNCTION OF NON-PERMANENT MEMBERS ON THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Although the ten non-permanent members command a technical majority in decision-making, the central questions — what items go on the agenda, what courses of action are taken — are dominated by the five permanent members. They act as the pacesetters for the Council. As Arthur Lall, the former Indian Permanent Representative to the UN, has noted, the permanent members set the guidelines on how much the Council will consult with the parties to a dispute, and how deeply involved it will become in any particular issue.⁶ Permanent members have an enormous advantage over non-permanent ones by virtue of their global influence and their superior experience, stemming from uninterrupted service on the Council. The right to veto, even if it is not used or explicitly threatened, greatly affects the nature of deliberations and decisions by the Council. The situation in the Security Council represents a tyranny of the minority, with permanent members blocking the work of the Council.

The non-permanent members rarely act as a cohesive bloc. When the reform of procedures and practices have been discussed, however, non-permanent members have often shown a degree of "class solidarity" by expressing a common desire to curtail the excessive reliance on the veto. One may cite the 1948/49 Berlin crisis as an instance when

the non-permanent members engaged in collective mediation. But the circumstances which produced such a response were highly unusual: the crisis was a direct confrontation among four of the five permanent members. It is more customary for some non-permanent members to align themselves with one or more permanent members to form an issue-specific coalition capable of producing a majority decision.

Despite these obvious constraints, non-permanent members can render useful, and at times essential, services in managing, mediating and settling international conflicts. With the exception of China, all permanent members are industrial states. In contrast, non-permanent members provide a more representative sample of the world at large. They can bring a specific perspective and influence to bear on regional conflicts. Occasionally they can instill a greater dynamism in the activities of the Council, where permanent members have shown a predilection for caution. In some instances, non-permanent members can act as proxies for Great Powers, introducing and supporting resolutions that would otherwise be difficult to market. At times, non-permanent members can mediate between the entrenched positions of the superpowers. They may moderate the extreme positions of smaller nations, which are more inclined to be flexible in the intimate forum of the Security Council than in the General Assembly. Even as an allied power, Canada has occasionally been able to mediate on an *ad hoc* basis in East-West conflicts by coming up with a suitable compromise formula or by providing the necessary drafting skills in formulating a resolution. The scope for Canadian mediation has been much greater, however, when issues are less directly related to the central East-West conflict: for example, the disputes over Kashmir and Cyprus, the question of independence for Indonesia and, more recently, Namibia.

Another opportunity for non-permanent members to influence the operation of the Security Council comes with the position of President of the Council, an office which rotates among all members of the Council on a monthly basis. The office of the President provides the incumbent with considerable prestige, formal authority to call meetings of the Council, and discretionary power to initiate informal consultations between the parties to a conflict and members of the Council. In this capacity, Ambassador Hans Tabor of Denmark adroitly negotiated the adoption of three successive ceasefire resolutions which terminated hostilities during the 1967 Middle East war. Similarly, Canada's Ambassador William Barton guided the complex negotiations on the controversial renewal of the Cyprus peacekeeping mandate during his presidency in 1977.

CANADA'S HISTORICAL RECORD ON THE SECURITY COUNCIL

In every instance, the Canadian decision to seek election to a seat on the Security Council was preceded by a careful assessment of the expected gains and costs of membership.

On the positive side, membership could affirm Canada's continuing belief in the principles of the UN Charter, and that might help overcome some of the criticism and pessimism concerning UN performance. It was also argued that Canada could help to foster world peace because of its experience with peacekeeping, and its ability to take a balanced position on major conflict issues before the UN, such as Cyprus, the Middle East and South Africa. Membership on the Council would also enhance Canadian prestige within the entire UN system and thereby provide extra leverage to influence decisions on peacekeeping, decolonization and the advancement of human rights. Finally, it was hoped that membership on the Council would enhance Canadian public interest and media coverage of UN affairs.

At the same time the liabilities of Council membership did not go unnoticed. Having a seat on the Security Council often compels the Canadian government to define its policy with greater precision and in greater depth, thereby risking criticism and retaliation at home and abroad. Security Council membership might divert attention and resources from other issues and could complicate election to other UN bodies. The calculations of possible gains and losses have given increasing attention to the impact which Council membership would have on Canada's bilateral foreign relations with the United States, as well as with other countries.

Although the perceived advantages of being on the Security Council have outweighed any counter-arguments, the final decision to seek election was often determined by a sense of duty more than any real enthusiasm. The decision to stand for the 1958/59 term, in particular, was taken with considerable reluctance. Ultimately, it was the argument that Britain needed a friendly voice on the Council to overcome its alienation from the United Nations after the recent Suez debacle which prompted the Canadian government to seek election.

The vigour with which the Canadian government conducted its recent campaign for election for the 1989/90 term thus contrasts with past behaviour. Three factors may help explain this divergence. First, the recent situation was unusual in the sense that it was a genuine election by the General Assembly rather than the customary confirmation by that body of the two candidates sponsored by the West European and Others Group. Second, the Mulroney government is particularly eager to give demonstrable proof of its continuing multilateral engagement in order to counteract the criticism that, following the Free Trade Agreement, bilateral relations with the United States have become the preoccupation of Canadian foreign policy. Finally, recent international developments like the Iran-Iraq ceasefire, the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Namibia accord have created a strong expectation that the Security Council will become a more effective and active instrument of international peace and security, thereby making Canadian membership a more desirable proposition.

Since Canada has just commenced its fifth term on the Security Council for the period from January 1989 to the end of December 1990, it is valuable to review briefly its previous experiences on the Council.

Term I: 1948/49

Surprisingly, Canada's first term on the Council was also the most successful one. Canada contributed to substantive decisions which helped to contain or resolve some critical international conflicts. This was a time when the Council was seized of several major conflicts, including the creation of the state of Israel, independence of Indonesia, the dispute over Kashmir, and the Berlin blockade. For the first three, which remained largely peripheral to the intensifying Cold War, there was considerable scope for action by members of the Council. Canada took an active part in the efforts to transform the truce arrangements between Israel and her Arab neighbours into a more durable armistice, and to facilitate the admission of Israel to the UN.

Canada's Permanent Representative, General McNaughton, dominated the proceedings of the Council, to a degree which was unusual for a non-permanent member, by the force of his cogent arguments and charismatic personality. He provided continuing direction during the protracted negotiations over Indonesian independence. In March 1949, he came up with a formula which broke the stalemate between the Netherlands and the Council and paved the way for the final settlement on the independence of Indonesia.

Although it ultimately failed, his mediation performance in the Kashmir dispute was no less impressive. He originally embarked on informal consultations with India and Pakistan during his term as President of the Council in December 1949. The Council then officially asked him to act as mediator, a role he continued for a while even after Canada had ceased to be a member of the Council. McNaughton's mediation strategy may be regarded as a model of fairness, flexibility and resourcefulness. Within the UN, there was considerable optimism that a settlement of the hitherto intractable Kashmir dispute was at hand, a view which was shared by the principal Indian and Pakistani negotiators. The plan which he proposed envisaged a balanced military disengagement by both parties in Kashmir that would not pose a security threat to either side. Military disengagement was to be followed by a plebiscite. The logic of McNaughton's plan in some ways foreshadows the rationale of contemporary arms control negotiations on balanced force reductions in Europe. The principle of symmetrical force reductions, which was central to McNaughton's scheme, proved unacceptable to India but served as a model for subsequent, though equally unsuccessful, UN proposals for a Kashmir settlement.

Term II: 1958/1959

This period may generally be seen as one of lost opportunities for the Security Council to mitigate the Cold

War. It produced several imaginative exploratory schemes or proposals by Canada. All of them remained unrealized in the climate of intense Cold War confrontation. The idea of giving the UN responsibility for supervising an international agreement on Berlin, including access routes, found no favour with Canada's Western allies. The proposal for a system of international inspection of the Arctic to reduce the threat of nuclear surprise attack, which was advanced by the US and Canada, was firmly rejected by the Soviet Union. The idea of a high-level meeting of the Security Council to deal with the crisis in Lebanon and Jordan and help prepare the way for a smaller Middle East conference, which was vigorously championed by Canada, proved equally unacceptable to the Soviets.

Term III: 1967/68

The agenda of the Security Council for this period was dominated by the 1967 Middle East war, Cyprus and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The events of the 1967 Middle East war proved particularly frustrating for Canada. Attempts by the Canadian and Danish representatives to persuade the Security Council to take preventive measures that might forestall the escalation of the Middle East crisis to a full-fledged war proved fruitless. Similarly, Canadian efforts to avoid an instant and unconditional UN response to the order by Egypt's President Nasser to evict UNEF troops from the Sinai failed. Moreover, Arab countries interpreted the UN response as an unfriendly act; any opportunity for Canada to exert a mediating influence during the war and its immediate aftermath had been undermined. Only in the less central issues, such as clarifying the facts of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, or helping to establish communication between the United States and North Korea following the "Pueblo" incident, did Canadian diplomacy prove more successful.⁷

Term IV: 1977/78

The peace initiative of Egypt's President Sadat provided a rare period of relative calm in the Middle East. The agenda of the Council concentrated more on Southern Africa with its interrelated problems of *apartheid*, Zimbabwe majority rule and independence for Namibia. In order to coordinate their respective policies on these issues more effectively, the Western powers on the Security Council — Britain, Canada, France, the German Federal Republic, and the United States — set up an informal consultative forum, referred to as the Contact Group or the Group of Five. The Contact Group made available its good offices in trying to find broad UN acceptance for a peace plan for Namibia. The plan comprised withdrawal by South Africa, free elections under UN supervision, and UN administrative services during Namibia's transition to independence. Although Canada was the least powerful member of the Group, it fulfilled three important functions: harmonizing members' interests; acting as the Group's spokesman in the UN, and during visits to Southern Africa;

and, finally, balancing the interests of the Group of Five with those of the African members on the Security Council, and their supporters from among other non-aligned states. The latter was a particularly difficult and sensitive task because the non-aligned nations looked upon the Group's mediation activity with considerable suspicion, fearing that it might serve as an effective smokescreen to postpone economic and political sanctions against South Africa. Because Canada was widely trusted by African nations, its presence on the Contact Group did much to establish the latter's credibility.

For a brief instant in the summer of 1978, it seemed as if the protracted negotiations of the Contact Group had finally succeeded; both South Africa and SWAPO* had accepted the plan for UN-supervised elections in Namibia. Success, however, was ephemeral. The Republic of South Africa defected from the agreement by proceeding with its own internal elections in Namibia, although indicating that the UN plan might yet be implemented at some unspecified future date. Although the Contact Group remained in existence after the collapse of its plan, it did not play a role in the negotiation of the Brazzaville Protocol of December 1988, nor did the Security Council as a whole. The accord was concluded in direct negotiations among Angola, Cuba and South Africa without formal participation by the UN. The Security Council will be responsible for the implementation of the Protocol — first, by setting up a verification commission to monitor the withdrawal of foreign forces from Angola and, second, by arranging for UN supervision of Namibian elections and by providing administrative personnel during the transition to independence.

PROSPECTS FOR 1989/90

The United Nations can register several recent successes in which it was either directly or indirectly involved, among them the agreement on Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Gulf war ceasefire agreement and the Brazzaville Protocol on Namibian independence. Nothing succeeds like success, and these events have done much to raise confidence in the UN's capacity to serve as an instrument of international peace and security.

A closely related development is the change in Soviet attitudes and policies concerning the security functions of the United Nations. In a series of general foreign policy statements and more specific proposals, Soviet political leaders and officials have called for an expansion of the UN role in peacekeeping, peacemaking, crisis management, and preventive diplomacy. This is in stark contrast with the traditional Soviet practice of restricting the security functions of the United Nations. In a widely noted lead article in *Pravda* and *Izvestia* of 17 September 1987, General Secretary Gorbachev proposed the creation of a UN multilateral war risk reduction centre, having direct communication links between UN headquarters and each

of the capitals of permanent members of the Security Council and the chairman of the non-aligned group. Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze has suggested that a multi-lateral verification centre be established under the auspices of the Secretary-General. Such a centre would enable the Secretary-General to dispatch fact-finding missions to areas of international tension and conflict. The information obtained could be used to initiate consultations with the disputing parties and members of the Security Council.

Such a verification centre has been partially realized, with Soviet support, by the establishment of the Office of Research and the Collection of Information (ORCI). Its task is to monitor international developments in countries and regions, thereby to provide the Secretary-General with early warning of serious developments which require his attention and initiatives. Eventually, ORCI may serve as an institutional memory of past UN crisis management and dispute settlement activities.

In another proposal, the Soviet government has called for frequent informal consultations by the Security Council at the level of foreign ministers.⁸ In 1977, Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs, Don Jamieson, proposed similar consultative meetings by foreign ministers. Such meetings would help identify potential trouble spots, and provide some guidelines for a possible course of action. The technical details of a solution would then be worked out during regular sessions of the Security Council. At the time, the proposal ran into strong opposition from the Soviet Union and China. Given the apparent change of Soviet attitude, it might be opportune for Canada to revive the proposal during its current term on the Council.

The specific issues which are likely to occupy the attention of the Security Council during the coming term will include many of the perennial problems like the Middle East, South Africa and Namibia. But like a deck of cards, they will be reshuffled and receive different priority and will probably be dealt with by a more effectively functioning Council. In the case of Namibia, the focus will no longer be on the negotiation of a settlement, but on problems relating to the implementation of an existing agreement. Similarly, the UN might become involved in supervising an agreement on the conflict in the Western Sahara, where there has been some movement toward a settlement, and in monitoring the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Kampuchea.

The possibility of the Security Council becoming involved in a peace plan for Central America is remote given the US reluctance to tolerate UN "interference" in the Western hemisphere, but it cannot be excluded altogether. It would be an extremely delicate matter for Canada to associate itself with those advocating an UN role in terminating the Central American conflict. South Africa will in all probability remain on the active Security Council agenda. The non-aligned members on the Council will press for comprehensive economic and political sanctions, unless

* South West African People's Organization

there is a fundamental revision of South Africa's policy of *apartheid*. In contrast to the preceding 1977/78 term, Canada will no longer be able to use its mediating role as a member of the Contact Group as a reason for deferring decisions on economic sanctions.

The Middle East promises to pose the greatest challenge, but also the greatest opportunity, for constructive engagement by the Security Council. The unpacified uprising by the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, and the dramatic revision of the official PLO** position on recognition of Israel and the issue of terrorism, have infused a new dynamism into Middle East affairs. The rapidly changing scene gives rise to conflicting and distorted information. The Security Council might find it valuable to send a fact-finding mission to the occupied territories to determine the attitude of the Palestinians toward any Israeli-sponsored local autonomy schemes, or to UN-initiated peace plans. It is highly probable that Canada would serve on such a fact-finding commission, in view of the expertise and standing which it has gained in the region as the result of participation in UN peacekeeping and observer missions.

An even more significant involvement by the Security Council in the Middle East peace process would be a direct attempt at mediation between the Israeli government and the PLO. While Canada enjoys the added prestige and leverage that comes from occupying a seat on the Security Council, it should give highest priority to such a mediation role by the Security Council. This might best be organized in the form of a new Contact Group, comprised of Council members who share a commitment to a peaceful settlement in the Middle East, and have some credibility in the region. Furthermore, the composition of the Middle East Contact Group should not be confined to Western members as in the Namibian case. For its part, the Canadian government would have to clarify its position on the political rights of the Palestinians, rather than offer a vague acknowledgement of unspecified rights.

If mediation efforts should prove to be fruitful, it will become necessary to assess the prospects for an international conference on the Middle East. The procedure which the Diefenbaker government advocated during the 1958 Lebanon crisis deserves to be re-examined. At the time, the Canadian government supported a compromise plan designed to bridge the US and Soviet conference proposals. The compromise plan envisaged a three-stage process. At the first stage, the Security Council would meet in regular session to prepare the agenda and groundwork for a Middle East conference. This would be followed by a session of the Council, meeting at the heads of government level and setting general guidelines. A meeting of this kind would allow non-permanent members to give their perspective. The final stage would comprise a smaller summit conference attended by the permanent members and key actors from the Middle East.

** Palestine Liberation Organization

CONCLUSION

During the next two years on the Security Council, Canada will be compelled to take a clear stand on a number of sensitive and controversial subjects. The immobilism and partial irrelevance which characterized much of the Council's work during preceding terms will no longer be sufficient to allow Canada to maintain its ambiguity on important issues. Thus membership will entail greater political risks. But at the same time it promises to be more worthwhile because of the very real opportunity for constructive action by the Security Council in the near future.

NOTES

1. For a comprehensive account of Security Council diplomacy during and following the 1967 Middle East war, see Arthur Lall, *The UN and the Middle East Crisis, 1967*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1968.
2. John Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace: Canada and the Search for World Order, 1943-1957*, vol. 1, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1979, pp. 267-268.
3. Chester Ronning to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, 10 January 1958; Department of External Affairs File 5475-CX-40(3).
4. Memo by the External Affairs Legal Division, 10 September 1954; File 5475-CX-40.
5. Response by the Canadian government to General Assembly Res. 2697 (XXV); A/8746.
6. Arthur Lall, "The Security Council in a Universal United Nations," *Occasional Paper*, no. 11, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, New York, 1971, p. 13.
7. George Ignatieff, "Sitting on the hot seat of the UN Security Council," *International Perspectives*, September/October 1976, p. 10.
8. Speech by Soviet Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Petrovsky, to the Queen's University Conference on the Reduction of the Risk of War through Multilateral Means, 7-8 October 1988.

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