

Chasing seat on the dysfunctional UN Security Council is a waste of Canada's time

Canada would make an important contribution to the world if it proposed serious reforms to the UN, tying voting rights to respect for defined human rights

by Conrad Black



From all accounts, the great foreign policy effort of the semi-re-elected federal government is to win a two-year term on the Security Council of the United Nations. This is as inane and worthless a policy objective as could possibly be devised. The UN is a moribund and corrupt organization that instead of providing a first step to world government is primal scream therapy for the world's most poorly and despotically governed and economically impoverished countries.

According to the UN's own figures, 91 of the UN's 192 member states have average per capita incomes of less than 10 per cent of Canada's (and Canada has descended to number 14 in the prosperity list, leaving out petro-states and tax-haven states – Kuwait, Monaco, Luxembourg, etc.). Approximately half of the member-states seriously fail to comply with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adherence to or at least believable ambition to achieve the goals of which is supposedly a criterion for membership in the UN. The declaration, largely composed by Canadian John P. Humphrey, with important contributions from such luminaries as René Cassin and Eleanor Roosevelt, legally binds all members of the UN to its definition of “fundamental freedoms and human rights.”

The UN was founded at the insistence of Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had been a member of the Woodrow Wilson administration that devised the League of Nations but failed to secure American entry into the League, helping to ensure its complete failure. Roosevelt intended for the permanent members of the Security Council to be much more active in preserving peace and stopping atrocities than they have been. Roosevelt saw that the United States would have half of the world's economic product, an atomic monopoly, and that the other four permanent members of the Security Council (China, France, the United Kingdom and the U.S.S.R., whose seat was allotted to the Russian Federation on the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991), would be heavily indebted to the U.S. He meant the UN to be a method for calming isolationist fears in the U.S. by showing that the U.S. was leading a co-operative movement of the world's leading powers; and also to disguise and make less objectionable by partly collegializing the effective American pre-eminence in the world. Had he lived to complete his fourth term as president, he would be able to exert greater influence on the whole world than anyone in history, and certainly intended to do so benignly. The Latin American and British Commonwealth countries were expected to vote with the

Americans and British, assuring their control of the General Assembly. Of course, FDR died, the Cold War began, the membership of the UN more than tripled in number, and everything has changed in these 75 years, except the U.S. remains the world's most powerful country.

Any campaign for one of the 10 temporary council seats involves a beauty parade before an electorate of poor and misgoverned countries, which tend to vote either for similar countries, or for those more important countries that outbid other contenders in various ways. There is a policy to assure that all regions are represented. North America is generally felt to be represented by the U.S., not an unreasonable position, given that it has over 70 per cent of the continent's population. Given that fact, Canada has to strive very hard to impress the General Assembly majority of its merits for a council seat. The present composition of temporary members is three European, three African, two Latin American, one East Asian/Australasian, and one Middle Eastern state. Generally, there are not successive terms. The openings in 2020 are Belgium, Dominican Republic, Germany, Indonesia, and South Africa. Canada's claim would be to succeed Belgium or Germany as a representative of the advanced Western countries, or Dominican Republic as a state in the Americas.

To have any chance of election, Canada would seriously have to impress the under-developed world with its generosity as a contributor of aid, its advocacy of international climate policy that embraced the old Kyoto concept of large direct cash payments to underdeveloped countries as a reward for them having supposedly forsworn the eco-unfriendly economic activity that generates economic growth and raises national and per capita incomes at the expense of environmental standards (as China is so ostentatiously doing, with India right behind it). At the theatre-of-the-absurd UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in 2009, China, the world's greatest polluter, and the fastest growing of the world's 50

largest economies, was noisily unrepentant about its ecological performance. It accused the advanced West of stupendous hypocrisy in creating the problem of industrial pollution and then waving unproved theories of climate change about like a bloody shirt to deter other countries from following the same path (fair comment except the West's problem has been naïveté, not cynicism). At the same time, with masterly, po-faced self-righteousness, China set itself at the head of G-77: all the under-developed countries demanding a stupendous quantum of compensation and reparations from the developed countries. The flip side of the Chinese performance was then-U.S.-president Barack Obama, who could not obtain an interview with the Chinese premier at the conference and padded about with an imaginary begging bowl asking for a commitment to annual contributions of U.S.\$10 billion to a fund for the G-77, though even Obama acknowledged that he would not approve payments to China. He got no takers and was left holding an empty bowl.

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The conference, and Obama's performance especially, were a prodigious fiasco. The whole climate change argument is denied by the U.S., China, India, Russia, South Korea and now effectively Japan and Australia. Apart from underdeveloped countries with rigidly cupped-hands demanding compensation for their economic backwardness for reasons having nothing to do with what is happening to the world's environment, climate change is still officially embraced only by chronically gullible Western Europe and Canada. I will not reiterate the points made in this column last week about the weakness of the climatist argument, except to repeat that it is now advanced only very tentatively by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which is customarily referred to as "98 per cent of the world's scientists," or some such fatuous

overstatement of specialist learned opinion.

The interesting policy question for Canadians is whether the present federal government's focus on climate change is a bi-product of its incomprehensible quest for two years with a Security Council seat, or the opposite. Which is the chicken and which is the egg? Better policy would be to reaffirm the desirability of environmentally safe production and export of oil and natural gas, declare a target of no increase in anthropogenic (human-generated) emissions pending some clear indication of whether anything unusual really is happening to world temperatures and climate, the end of truckling to the world's least respectable regimes, and Canadian leadership in a movement to reform the UN. Canada would make an important contribution to the world if it proposed serious reforms to the UN in calibrating votes, tying voting rights to respect for defined human rights, to proportionate payments to meet the organization's budget, and generally to reform administration and reward respect for the UNs' founding values as enunciated by Humphrey and others. This is the way to gain respect and stature and accomplish something valuable to the world, rather than trying to impress a rag-tag of disreputable leaders from under-achieving governments, however deserving of tangible compassion their populations may be.

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