

SEATS AT THE TABLE

Evaluating the 2010 Security Council Vote

In the fall of 2010, the United Nations will be holding a vote to determine which two countries will secure a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. The three countries vying for a spot on the Council are Canada, Germany, and Portugal. Most political observers believe that Germany is all but guaranteed one of the spots, leaving Canada and Portugal to compete for the remaining available seat. Having a seat on the Security Council is seen as an eminent position in the global community: having a seat allows them to actively participate alongside permanent members regarding international security matters, and further their respective international efforts.

What are the chances of each of these three countries, and what would a seat on the Security Council mean to them?

Canada

History is on Canada's side as they have garnered a non-permanent seat every decade since the Security Council's inception in 1946. In addition, they have never run for a seat on the Security Council and lost. David Bosold, who is the head of the International Forum on Strategic Thinking at the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik (German Council on Foreign Affairs), feels Canada has a very good chance at securing a seat in the upcoming vote. He cites the fact that Canada has a long record of U.N. achievements as well as its solid relationships with the Pacific Rim and Caribbean countries. Bosold also believes that Canada has the best chance of winning the votes of many of the "banana republics", i.e. the small island states of the Pacific and Caribbean which could be key votes, and goes on to suggest that Canada's membership in the Organization of American States (OAS), La Francophonie and the Commonwealth will provide them with a distinct advantage over both Germany and Portugal.

While Canada may be regarded favourably by some countries, some African states do not view them in the same light. Under Prime Minister Harper's leadership, aid to Africa has been reduced from fourteen prioritized states to seven. However, Canada has doubled its aid expenditures to Africa over this same period. There has been a shift in aid dollars from Africa to South America and some pundits feel that the lack of support from Africa may hurt Canada's chances as Africa has 53 votes, and Canada needs to secure at least 123 out of 192 votes to gain a seat. Canada's pro-Israeli stance is a major factor that will play into the minds of the 56 Islamic states.

Another potential drawback for Canada's chances of a seat is its environmental record. Recently, European Union President Jose Manuel Barroso has been very critical of Canada's environmental record, suggesting that Canada's reactive stance is not acceptable, and that they should be more proactive in the fight against global climate change. These comments came on the heels of UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon's recent visit to Canada where Moon was quoted as saying, "I urge Canada to comply fully with the targets set out by the Kyoto Protocol. You can strengthen your mitigation target for the future, and you can join the other industrialized countries in cultivating new

funding in keeping with your long-standing tradition of global solidarity.¹” Canada has not only come under fire from the international community, but it even faces opposition from its own people as well. The Council of Canadians made it known to Moon that Canada did not deserve a seat on the Security Council because they fell short in meeting international norms, and highlighted the fact that Canada did not sign the 2007 Declaration of Rights on the Rights of Indigenous People.

Despite these potential shortcomings, Canada’s chance of winning a seat was given a ringing endorsement in February of this year as Colin Keating, who is the founding Executive Director of Security Council Report, was quoted as saying, “There is a good chance Canada and Germany will be there... From the New York perspective, Haiti and Afghanistan loom large on the radar screen. Nobody forgets to invite Canada to the party.²”

Another positive for Canada is that they are competing against two European countries. If Portugal and Germany were to both win seats, then it would effectively create a bloc of EU countries along with permanent members France and the UK. This is something that the Security Council may want to try and avoid and could play to Canada’s favour. Such an instance has occurred before in 1989 when Canada competed against Greece and Finland for a seat on the Security Council. Yves Fortier, who was part of the Canadian U.N. envoy at the time of the vote, was quoted as saying, “We presented the too-many-Europeans argument and it was very successful.³”

While Canada has traditionally been regarded as a dead cert when they have run previously, securing a seat this time may be much more difficult than it has been in the past. Despite Canada’s strong support for the United Nations, and solid reputation for aiding in humanitarian missions, the fact remains that there is opposition against them for their pro-Israeli stance and reducing its number of African aid-recipient states. Canada's positioning in the three-way race to secure the 128 votes needed to gain a seat on the council is strong. However with strong competition from the European contenders, there is no such thing as a sure win.

Germany

Most analysts view Germany as a certainty for one of the available seats. Germany has been a non-permanent member on the Security Council four times previously, and is arguably the political and economical engine of the EU. In addition to this, Germany is the UN’s third largest financial contributor with 8.5% of the UN’s annual budget, surpassed by only the USA and Japan.

Germany has a large sphere of influence politically and economically within the EU, and they belong to the “Group Of Four” (G4), which is also comprised of Japan, India, and Brazil. These countries have been advocating reform within the Security Council and have suggested that the permanent seats be expanded to include the G4, including two permanent seats from African Nations and four additional non-permanent seats. This would see the Security Council expand from 15 members to 25 members, but the proposed reform has been met with lukewarm reception from the international

¹ Gurzu, Anka. “Climate Change Criticism Reaches New Level”. Embassy Magazine 16 May, 2010.

² Ward, Olivia. “Canada Eyes Seat At Big Table”. Toronto Star. 20 Feb, 2010.

³ N.A. “U.N. Security Council Seat Bid Slated By Canadians”. 13 May, 2010

community. However, some suggest that Germany should take on a greater global responsibility in the post cold-war world. A major actor in not only European, but also global affairs, Germany has been a staunch advocate for human rights and international diplomacy throughout the world.

Bosold agrees with many of the analysts and believes that Germany will be one of the two countries winning a seat on the Security Council as they have support from the Asian and Middle Eastern states. They are a vital actor in the EU-Middle East relationship, as in March of 2009 Germany participated alongside the P5 (P5+1) to help facilitate discussions with Iran on its nuclear program. Bosold feels that Germany's chances may be enhanced as a result of their relations with the Middle East, saying: "Although Germany clearly has strong ties with Israel, it is seen as a neutral state in the most positive sense of the word." He also feels that Germany's position on Iraq will hold a lot of weight in the minds of the voters as well.

What makes Germany a strong candidate though is their international diplomatic and humanitarian efforts. Germany was a strong advocate for The International Court system, created in The Hague, and they were strong advocates for their desire to acquire a permanent Security Council seat intervention in Darfur while other countries took more of a reactive approach. Germany has also been a major contributor of soldiers and resources in Afghanistan, as well as other peaceful missions in places like Cambodia and Bosnia.

Ultimately though, Germany wants to play a larger role in global security responsibilities and have made clear their desire to acquire a permanent Security Council seat. While most feel Germany will have no problems winning a non-permanent seat, they do face opposition for procuring a permanent one. Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain oppose the idea of Germany having a permanent seat, as they would prefer to see a seat for the whole European Union. In addition to Germany facing opposition from European states, they do not have the full support of the United States either. The United States is more in favour of an overall reform of the Security Council, and has been non-committal regarding Germany's bid, while fully endorsing Japan's bid for permanent membership. Only the UK and France have publicly supported the idea of the G4 joining as a whole. Out of the three candidates, Germany can offer the most to the Security Council. Its diplomatic and international efforts speak volumes about how Germany is actively engaged in U.N. mandated missions. The fact that Germany is actively lobbying for a permanent seat on the Security Council shows they want a greater responsibility in global security affairs and with what Germany can offer, it would be a shock to see them not secure a seat.

Portugal

Portugal is seen by some political observers as the country on the outside looking in regarding the Security Council vote, but a closer look would indicate that this may not be the case. Portugal has held a seat on the Security Council on four separate occasions, most recently from 1997 to 1998. It was during this period that Portugal played a major role in encouraging former Indonesian President B. J. Habibie to recognize East Timor, a former colony of Portugal, as an independent State.

Canada will suggest that two European States on the Security Council is not in the best interest, a card they effectively played in the 1989 council vote when they ran against Finland and Greece. Portugal will counter Canada's 'too many Europeans' argument by refining and projecting an image of Portugal as a unique and autonomous state, despite being a member of the EU.

"The Portuguese Foreign Ministry has repeatedly sought to portray Portugal as a country of universal vocation, trying to decouple its foreign policy from the European block," says Dr. Licia Simao, who holds a PhD in International Relations, and is a researcher at the Research Unit in Political Science and International Relations at the University of Minho in Braga, Portugal. Simao feels that Portugal has positioned itself as a strong contender and goes on to add that, "Portuguese contacts in Africa, with the Arab countries, with Latin America and in Asia have all been actively developed, so that Portugal can present a truly universal image of itself." Simao feels that by doing this, Portugal can present itself in a light that would offset the "too European" argument. Portugal will also look to the argument that the Security Council should avoid privileging large and wealthy countries such as Germany and Canada.

In terms of foreign policy and applications, Portugal is of the belief that smaller nations should be better represented within the Security Council. They are also involved in many international and regional organizations such as the European Union, Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries, Ibero-American Summit, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, NATO, and the Euro-Med Forum.

Portugal has also been a major contributor towards international peace and security objectives by supporting UN security mandates. Measured by GDP per capita, Portugal is one of the largest contributors to UN Missions, participating in 20 UN peacekeeping missions and contributing more police to UN operations than any other western country. "Portuguese diplomacy has also invested time and effort to be seen in the UN as a dedicated partner, committed to the values of the organization in all areas, and capable of significant contributions, even in complex issues," adds Simao. Portugal has taken on a very proactive role in recent years, in various international affairs, which helps strengthen their case to join the Security Council. Simao further adds, "The foreign ministry has been carefully linking its actions in the international arena to the overarching goal of getting this seat on the Security Council."

Portugal does however face some criticism from the international community as their stance on the 2003 invasion of Iraq may be seen as "circumventing international laws and the United Nations," says Simao. It was during this time that former Prime-Minister Durão Barroso hosted the Azores summit in which the United States obtained the approval of Spain and the United Kingdom to invade Iraq.

The environment could be an influential factor for securing a potential seat, and Portugal has made serious environmental reforms in recent years, which may give them an advantage over Canada, and possibly Germany. Portugal was actively engaged in the Copenhagen summit this past December by agreeing to cut carbon emissions and promote renewable energies. They were also involved in advancing water related issues at the 'Water For Life' conference, sponsored by the UNDP. Simao feels, that in the event of a tight race, environmental issues could make the difference.

Portugal also has strong historic relations with Arab countries, and has made major contributions to the peace efforts in Lebanon. Simao also feels, despite Portugal contributing to the Iraq and Afghan war, by sending small, technical contingents it allowed them to maintain Euro-Atlantic ties, while not ruffling the feathers of their Middle-Eastern counterparts. Portugal also has been a vocal supporter of Turkey's accession to the EU, which should garner them with support from Islamic states.

Is Portugal still an 'outsider' looking in? That remains to be seen, but their foreign policy record and diplomatic efforts cannot be overlooked or understated. Portugal is very eager to take on a larger role in global security affairs, and their contributions of police forces in Afghanistan, along with the 20 UN Peace missions they have been a part of, show that they are committed to working cooperatively with United Nations. Portugal's environmental record and strong relations with Arab and African countries may be enough to help them secure a seat. Most observers feel that it is a two-man race between Portugal and Canada, so it will be an interesting development to see who will secure the final seat.

Conclusion

The upcoming vote will be a very interesting one as it is shaping up to be a two horse race between Portugal and Canada. All three countries have the potential to offer the Security Council different strengths, but attaining a seat ultimately requires a great deal of politicking. In this regard, it's difficult to pick two concrete winners because these actions take place behind closed doors, and each country can offer other country certain things such as trade agreements, or other bilateral deals. Some may suggest that the G20 has overtaken the Security Council in terms of relevance and responsibilities, and others argue that the Council is outdated and is in need of major reform. The fact remains that these seats are still highly coveted and are seen as a way for countries to play a larger responsibility in global security affairs alongside the most important actors (the P5). By taking a larger responsibility in global security affairs, it in essence raises the respective profiles of all non-permanent members in other various international arenas. There are three countries running, but only two seats at the table. Who will be the two sitting, and who will be left standing? We'll find out in September.

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