

We've all got a stake in this and there is no time to waste

If a commitment to peace rather than military and economic might were the main consideration, permanent membership to the Security Council might more appropriately be granted to New Zealand, Norway, Ireland, Austria, Bhutan, or a host of other nations, rather than the incumbents.



Earl Turcotte
Opinion

Canadians will soon learn whether or not we win a new temporary seat on the UN Security Council. "The UN Security Council is the big table," Foreign Affairs Minister François-Philippe Champagne said recently. "This is where the most consequential decisions are taken with respect to peace and security around the world." I agree, but not because the Secu-

rity Council is the apex security body of the United Nations, because it isn't. Moreover, the most consequential decisions with respect to peace and security are not always or even very often taken by the Security Council, per se, but by the individual permanent members of the Security Council—the U.S., Russia, China, the U.K., and France (P-5)—the first three of these, in particular, and usually based upon what they deem to be in their narrow national interests.

Back to the status of the Security Council within the UN architecture. Article 24 of the Charter of the United Nations confers upon the Security Council "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security." This responsibility is granted by member nations of the General Assembly "in order to ensure prompt and effective action by the United

Nations." Moreover, "in carrying out its duties under this responsibility, the Security Council acts on their behalf." Thus, the Security Council is both mandated by and accountable to the UN General Assembly, the most powerful body of the United Nations. This is the really "big table." Here, each member state has a vote and a modicum of power—power that can be harnessed to address all manner of security threats including, when necessary, irresponsible behaviour by members of the Security Council itself.

It is perhaps the most tragic of ironies that the five permanent members of the UN Security Council are among the world's largest arms exporters. (The U.S. alone accounts for 35 per cent of global arms exports). Further, that all absolutely refuse to give up their nuclear weapons—weapons whose continued existence poses an existential threat to all of humanity. Where is the security in this?

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to the Security Council might more appropriately be granted to New Zealand, Norway, Ireland, Austria, Bhutan, or a host of other nations, rather than the incumbents.

The central point, however, is that far from being the exclusive domain of the Security Council, international peace and security is ultimately the business, prerogative and the responsibility of every nation. And whether or not Canada wins a new term on the Security Council, there is a tremendous amount more that we could be doing, from ceasing the export of Canadian-made light armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia, to working with the UN and like-minded nations to dramatically step up pressure on nuclear-armed states to eliminate their nuclear arsenals before some fool deliberately or accidentally sets our world ablaze. We've all got a stake in this and there is no time to waste.

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