

**THE UNITED NATIONS AND CANADA**

**WHAT CANADA COULD AND SHOULD DO  
AT THE UNITED NATIONS 2018:  
A QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP**

**Canada and Saudi Arabia – some UN implications**

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There were some hesitations about inserting a chapter in this booklet with any Middle-Eastern resonance considering the dearth of Canadian policy towards the region ... beyond the “brave” abstention on the UN General Assembly’s resolution to thwart the US decision to move their Embassy to Jerusalem. There was a total lack of reference to the Middle East in Foreign Minister Freeland’s otherwise solid foreign policy speech in Parliament on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

In fact, the only Middle Eastern issue of significance which created rifts throughout Canada’s political establishment and beyond was the sale to Saudi Arabia of the armored jeeps built by GDLS in Eastern Ontario for \$15 billion. And today, Saudi Arabia is haunting Canada once again in cutting off all relations in response to a ministerial tweet critical of the Kingdom’s human rights. Thereafter we found ourselves very lonely in the world. Clearly our Jerusalem abstention did not get us brownie points from our US neighbours, themselves deeply imbedded in a Saudi embrace. The silence of our EU “partners” was deafening as well.

So the real question in all this is the broader foreign policy impact of the “Canadian tweet-gate” notably for Canada’s UN ambitions. This question in no way reduces my admiration for the principled stand of Canada. Furthermore, the insistence on bemoaning the tweet as THE mistake is somewhat spurious if not hypocritical inasmuch as had the Minister made a similar statement to a journalist, the Saudi reaction would most likely have been the same. It is equally clear that as Canada matters less for Saudi Arabia than other partners benefitting from more juicy contracts with the Kingdom, we became the scapegoat to warn others not to annoy the Royal Prince. That this outburst is a reflection of changing paradigms on the international stage cannot be dismissed either. And that is what Canada needs to worry about both in terms of its eventual defence of the broad multilateralist liberal order and with respect to its UN Security Council campaign. Both are interrelated.

On the former, it is clear that the international liberal order is under attack, plagued by Trump’s waning US engagement, a weak and divided West, poor leadership, illiberalism, electoral gamesmanship, and growing inequalities feeding a general mistrust in government. Meanwhile, hostility towards

Western democracy and its human rights mantra is fed by both the catastrophic impact of the 2008 financial crisis which destroyed the non-western world's confidence in the western economic model, and the appeal of the autocratic, state-run, Chinese economic and political mode. So, a major shift that can be expressed as "dewesternization" is happening exactly at a time when we ask and expect the Trudeau government to assume a certain leadership to rekindle the faith in multilateralism, the UN, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and in the UN.

So the news is not very good: Saudi Arabia's reaction, the muteness of our allies, our own weakness in articulating what should be a resounding call for an alliance of like-minded countries in defence of the international liberal order, the unholy alliance between China and Russia in subverting that order, all point to a very unappealing outcome. Just from the perspective of our UN Security Council campaign, what we, Canada, represents is anathema to a growing number of countries we could count on in the past. Saudi Arabia will make sure that as many members of the Arab League as possible will vote for Ireland and Norway. China, possibly miffed by the Trudeau team adding environmentalism, labor relations, feminism and human rights into a Canada-China bilateral trade negotiations, could likely use its leverage to bring its Asian partners in line. Even Japan's irksomeness towards our Prime Minister's initial AWOL on **the Trans-Pacific Partnership** might remain. Hopefully the Australians as loyal CANZ partners will have forgiven. India may not consider Commonwealth loyalty significant.

So what? Not only must the Trudeau government light the afterburner for its Security Council campaign with a maximum personal involvement by the PM and his ministers, in addition to a cohort of special envoys with UN experience. Canada must come with a compelling agenda. The latter should include walking the talk through concrete engagements – Mali should be a beginning, not the end of our commitment to peacekeeping, and we should also voice leadership in areas of conflict prevention, stabilization, peacebuilding and development (0.29 % of GDP will not do!), becoming a thought leader on climate change. Canada must develop a more cohesive approach and process on human rights.

But more importantly, over the next 12 months, Canada needs to build a coalition of countries for the defence of democracy. Too many countries have left the bandwagon. Yet their people want their governments to rejoin.

The ultimate result of the Saudi episode may be that Canada may find a truer path to world leadership. It is not just a question of manoeuvring in global institutions – although this too is necessary. True leadership means continuous principled support of key international norms such as human rights and democracy. We must try to mobilize the support of like-minded countries for this democratic-human rights agenda but even if we have to start off alone, we must ride high in the saddle. We need a plan to make human rights both universal and universally applicable.