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QI Panel:

Will Carney's Davos Speech Help Build a Better International Order?

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Zach Paikin

Good afternoon, and welcome to today's webinar. My name is Zach Paikin and I'm the Deputy Director of the better order project. As the world continues to move away from the unipolar structure born after the end of the Cold War, it also risks fracturing into competing and rival orders. The increasingly diffuse balance of power and the rising influence of the global south together ensure that no state or group of states can set the terms of international order unilaterally. The better order project contends that to ensure peace, stability and a fighting chance against transnational threats, the world needs enhanced norms and laws to rejuvenate an inclusive global order rooted in international law multilateralism and the ability of states to participate on an equal basis. Our project forms part of the activities of the Quincy Institute for Responsible statecraft, a trans partisan think tank in Washington DC that is working to build a world where peace is the norm and war the exception.

And now to the theme of today's webinar, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney's recent speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos made headlines for its willingness to call out the growing appetites of all great powers, including the United States. But it was also noteworthy for its admission that Western countries have been selective in their enforcement of the so called rules based international order. Going forward, Mr. Carney promises that we will now see more variable geometry, meaning different coalitions on different sets of issues. But what does this mean for the future of multilateralism, multilateral reform and international order? More broadly, key eyes executive vice president Trita Parsi and I offer our thoughts in an article published yesterday by our in house magazine, responsible statecraft, and you can find the link to that article in the webinar chat.

But to unpack things even further, we are delighted, and we are privileged to welcome today Ambassador David Lametti, among other things. Dr Lametti was previously a professor in the Faculty of Law at McGill University in Montreal, my alma mater as well, and then served as Canada's Minister of Justice and Attorney General from 2019 to 2023 and is currently Canada's ambassador to the United Nations in New York City. Mr. Ambassador, we especially appreciate you taking the time to join us as our boys are taking on the checks in their opening game in Milan, where Mark Stone has just put Canada up two to nothing in the second period on a pass in front from Mitch Marner. Now let's start with Prime Minister Carney's comments about the rules based international order. If you don't mind, you'll recall that in 2017 less than a decade ago, Canada's then Foreign Affairs Minister, your former cabinet colleague, Chrystia Freeland,

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delivered an address to Parliament that made the defense of the rules based international order into the guiding principle of Canadian foreign policy.

But allow me now to quote from Prime Minister Carney's remarks delivered last month in Davos. He said, quote, we knew the story of the international rules based order was partially false, that the strongest would exempt themselves when convenient, that trade rules were enforced asymmetrically, and we knew that international law applied with varying rigor, depending on the identity of the accused or the victim. This fiction was useful end quote, and he even drew a parallel on top of this, between the West's rules based international order discourse and the lies that once sustained communist regimes. So let me ask you, given all of that over the past nine years, what exactly changed?

David Lametti 4:01

Well, I think a recognition that that there are certain powers in the world who are apparently increasingly inclined to not, not just not respect the rules based order, but not use the language of the rules based order. It's always been a fundamental, I won't say irony. It's actually been a fundamental presupposition of public international law, or the or or international law generally, that even when a nation state wasn't necessarily following, or perhaps was running a risk of not following a particular norm, it would try to couch what it was doing within the language of the norm itself. Right? We saw that most recently, we saw that most recently with Venezuela without, without making a comment about the American action Venezuela, at the very least. Was couched in terms of defending the United States and defending the United States against a security threat, so that that language and international law was always important. It remains important. The rules and norms that are there remain important.

But what Prime Minister Carney, I think, was referring to was the obvious, which is increasingly large, countries in particular, were not necessarily even bothering to disguise that their actions within the framework of the language of the international order. And that's having an impact that illustrates that illustrates a change. He characterized it as a rupture, quite rightly and and we therefore need to look at we therefore need to continue to look at the international order, obviously, but we also need to look at other ways to operate, in order to secure Canada's borders, in order to secure Canada's trade interests, in order to to promote Canada's values, and that still remains important in order to promote Canada's values.

And the Prime Minister, I think, is, is pushing us towards thinking about variable kinds of of alliances. I'm going to say temporary. Temporary can vary long term, but, or very short term, as the case may be, but pushing us towards thinking about the those kinds of temporary alliances and structures that would allow us to advance Canada's interest or secure Canada's interests. I think it's fair to say, within still within the larger structure of the rules based order, Prime Minister reiterated that the UN Charter was was still important and represented our values. So there isn't a there isn't a complete discarding of the of the current international rules based order, but rather a recognition that there are certain gaps where we may need to act otherwise.

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Zach Paikin 6:57

Got it. Let me pick up on the Venezuela issue, if you don't mind that you brought up, which is, I mean, the United States did recently violate the UN charter's prohibition on the use of force, which Mr. Carney referred to in his speech as being an important norm, by attacking the sovereign country of Venezuela and kidnapping its de facto leader. And yet the response from most Western leaders was merely to pay lip service to the importance of international law without explicitly condemning the attack as a violation of international law. So now that we are somewhat more prepared to acknowledge the hypocrisies of the rules based order, narrative is Canada going forward, going to unambiguously call out and condemn all violations of international law, no matter where and no matter who the perpetrator may be.

David Lametti 7:38

But look, I think, I think, I think the Prime Minister has pushed us towards a pragmatic realism. And I think pragmatic realism would probably tell us that there's no set answer to the question you've just asked. It's going to depend on it's going to depend on circumstances. Look the values, the values remain entrenched in a variety of different places and spaces. The UN Charter being the being the best example. And we are still going to we are still going to promote those values. The Prime Minister has made that clear. We are still going to work to defend Canada's interests. We're still going to work with our allies. We're still going to work to quietly, shape and publicly shape discussions as is appropriate as we move forward.

So I don't know, I can't say for certain what the answer to your question will be, but moving forward, I think we have to be pragmatic, and we have to keep our values in front of us, but understand that we're working in we're working in a different world, where, in one case we may use an institution such as the United Nation, the United Nations, and we may use the institutions of the world based order. Or in another situation, we may call upon other middle powers with like minded values and and and principles to achieve some other end goal, for the benefit of Canada and for the benefit of the world order.

Zach Paikin 9:09

Thanks so much for the very frank response. And one last question on this, there is a narrative out there that Western countries are finally calling out Trump's violations of global norms with a little bit more force, because now we're the ones who are being targeted, right? You know, many seem to have no problem, so long as the quote, unquote, right countries are the ones who are being bombed. And by that I mean non white countries in the Global South. But once Trump set his sights on Greenland, Western leaders began singing a very different tune. Do you think that that inconsistency there, you know, poses a potential risk to the diplomatic and normative power of Western countries going forward.

David Lametti 9:44

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Well, I would challenge the premise with respect to Canada. First of all, we have been we have been vocal throughout, defending our own interests, defending our own border. We all have saw the sort of 51st day rhetoric which was rejected time and time again. By not only our prime minister, but by Canadians. And frankly, no one has more to lose than Canada in any of these discussions we have. We have an economy that has been more or less, let's say, very well integrated with that of the United States for for well over a century, if not longer, if you take into account pre pre Canadian trade ties, pre pre colonial trade ties, even, I mean, it's, it's the geography of North America runs north south. Canada has an integrated economy. We have an integrated defense and security system. We share, we share our ad defense with the United States, it's interoperable, so nobody has more to lose than Canada by standing up to the United States.

Zach Paikin 11:43

You were just talking about how the economy of North America runs north south, and Canada has a great deal to lose?

David Lametti 11:49

Yeah, and so does our defense. I'm not sure if the NORAD part got cut out, but we we defend North America jointly with the United States. NORAD is one example. We're partners in NATO, and so no one has more to lose than Canada on the security front, on the economic front, in many ways, on the personal front, a lot of personal ties between the two countries, and yet we have consistently made, you know, made clear where we are willing to negotiate in good peace. And we've also drawn our lines, and we've stuck to them. So I can't speak for other countries in Europe, other countries, and I can't speak for Europe, but I certainly can speak for us in the sense that we have been, we have been firm and we have been clear and we've we frankly, have more to lose than anybody else, and yet we still have been anyway.

Zach Paikin 12:38

Thanks so much. Let's move now to this theme of variable geometry, which is one of the key terms in the Prime Minister's address. In your understanding, is the primary focus of variable geometry merely building ad hoc coalitions on specific issues, or is it something more ambitious, like building a block of middle powers to defend international integration and international law against great power attempts to carve out spheres of influence, for example.

David Lametti 13:03

I think it's early days. Zach, to be honest, we Davos was was really in international terms, only a short time ago. And I think it is possible that both of your hypotheses might be true and that both might be true at the same time, I think there's room to there's room to see situations where it will be ad hoc and perhaps even temporary. On the other hand, I think there's also room to say depending on, on, on the ongoing practices and behavior of of countries, of big powers that

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there might be room for, for more stable coalitions. Of what the Prime Minister has made clear is that we're prepared to lead, and we're prepared to lead according to our values. And I think it could take it could take us in either direction or both directions at the same time, but it's still, it's still very early, and we'll have to, we'll have to see it's variable precisely because we'll have to see issue by issue and and I suppose region by region, as we move forward.

Zach Paikin 14:16

Right along the region by region, I mean all these different middle powers. They often face very different regional context. They have very different interests with each other. Sometimes they are even rivals with each other. In your short experience at the UN to date, you know, have you had significant experience and success with dealing with other middle powers and bridging the gaps, even though Canada's often quite far away geographically from many of them?

David Lametti 14:38

Well, the UN in New York is a rather unique place, simply because all the countries in the world are here, and I have, you know, 193 counterparts here. And for the most part, it's a tight it's a tightly knit group, and we do see each other very often, whether it's in formal things like the General Assembly or echo SOC or Security Council. Or whether it's less formal settings and other committees and receptions, there is a great deal of goodwill. I mean, I can't I haven't been here long enough to say we've solved problem x or problem Y, working with countries A, B and C, but what I can say is that particularly after the Prime Minister's speech in Davos, there has been a lot of buzz, generated good buzz, in the sense that people are coming up to me as the ambassador of Canada, and saying, loved your Prime Minister's speech.

How can we, how can we make this work moving forward, always willing to work with Canada moving forward, those kinds of messages were abundant, both in bilateral settings, but also in front of other in front of other colleagues at at larger group settings. Love what Canada said, We love what the Prime Minister said. We're willing to work and so there is a great deal of goodwill that has been generated a great number of countries looking for leadership. It's these aren't easy times. These are complicated times you will have. You know, if you look at at what's happening in the world, you understand the complexity. And so countries are looking for a leader of the kind of that Prime Minister Carney is demonstrating to be, and that's important, and that's important for the whole project moving forward.

Zach Paikin 16:32

Thanks so much to help us understand variable geometry and its strategic implications a little further. I know it's early days, as you said, but is there a sense in your mind that Canada could even come to embrace elements of what we call in the global south multi alignment? You know, countries like Brazil and India pursue not just non alignment often, but even multi alignment. You know, does Canada have something to learn from from global south countries there in its ability and their ability to maintain relations with all sorts of different powers simultaneously? Or do you

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anticipate, rather, that the very variable geometry is likely to be, you know, rather a relatively minor compliment to a Canadian foreign policy that's just inevitably going to remain largely anchored in in North America and the transatlantic alliances, as you were mentioning before, for the reasons you mentioned before.

David Lametti 17:18

Well, hard to speculate on, on what it might look like. But certainly, I, certainly, I would think that all options on the table. So using the UN, continuing to use the UN where the UN is effective, or can be effective, continuing to improve the UN where the UN needs improvement, but also continuing to build, beginning to build other kinds of alignments. And multi alignments are possible, recognizing not only our traditional, our traditional groupings and and remember, we have other groupings already right, like the g7 and the g20 which the OECD, which aren't part of the UN structure and and sit alongside it and are either more important or less important, depending on the circumstances and the questions being discussed. Those those kinds of things will continue.

I certainly think there are a number of countries in the Global South who are increasingly important, not only economically, but in terms of in terms of values. Think of Brazil, for example, which showed a great deal of democratic resiliency in its last elections and continues to move forward with a democratically elected government, notwithstanding pressures against it. So there is one could say, you know, one. One could look at India and see the economic power that exists. Again. We're trying to reset there. And this is not to say we agree with every, every policy that the Indian government has, and the Indian government wouldn't agree with every policy that we have, but find ways to work with India within the context of the UN within the context of enhancing trade, within other contexts as cases may arise.

Zach Paikin 19:13

Thanks so much. And to our audience, please feel free to post some questions using the Q and A function at the bottom of your screen. We'll try to get to a few of those in the second half of the webinar, but let me turn in the meantime to the theme of human rights Ambassador the Prime Minister's speech did touch on human rights as being one of the primary principles that Canada will continue to promote. But does the pursuit of variable geometry, in your view, mean toning down criticism of authoritarian regimes at the UN your immediate predecessor, Bob Ray, for example, was not shy about calling out China at the United Nations, and he even called for a UN investigation into the plight of the Uyghurs in China.

But now Canada is using the language of strategic partnership to describe its relationship with Beijing, following and in the lead up to as well, Prime Minister. And his recent trip to to Beijing. So what is the standard we should expect going forward on this front from Canada, as it relates to the intersection between the need to pursue pragmatism and variable geometry on the one hand, and human rights norms on the other?

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David Lametti 20:13

Well, I think the first thing to underline is the most important point, which is we remain firmly committed to advancing human rights around the world and protecting protecting human rights, both within Canada and in other places, that hasn't wavered. That hasn't changed. I think what we are admitting in this world and the United Nations remains one of the primary institutions for that dialog, the Human Rights Council, as well as as well as the other institutions, the United States, of the United Nations, remains the principal forum where a lot of these discussions will happen.

That being said, I think, I think what we have come to realize is that there are, there are times when for cultural reasons, for for for economic reasons, the advancement of human rights is best done in in a lower key, and is best done with a with a private conversation, as opposed to, as opposed to public criticism that that recognizes that there are different cultures and there are different there are different challenges, and protecting human beings and protecting human rights is a complex is a complex issue, and there are times when we will need to call people out. There are times when we will need to use other levers that are less obvious but hopefully more effective in ultimately protecting the human rights of people around the world.

Zach Paikin 21:57

We have a question from Liv Serba in our audience, and she asks, is Canada going to be a vocal defender of LGBT rights and especially women's rights at the UN? I think we saw a headline a few months ago that the Prime Minister plans to step back from his predecessor Justin Trudeau's feminist foreign policy. Do you anticipate that that's going to manifest itself in any concrete fashion in terms of Canada's engagement at the UN?

David Lametti 22:20

We continue to prioritize in terms of what we do at the UN we continue to prioritize the protection of women's rights, the protection of LGBTQ plus rights, and that will continue what we what we do not want is for the rhetoric to get in the way of the substance, so we are still substantively committed to advancing all of these, I would say, traditional Canadian values, or important Canadian values, but we won't let rhetoric get in the way of being effective at doing that, and again, understanding that this is a complex world, and in order to to advance the rights of the human rights of individuals, we will need to have different kinds of strategies depending on the context, but the commitment hasn't wavered.

Zach Paikin 23:17

Thanks so much. Let's now move on to the theme of multilateral reform. In particular, this is an issue that you know we've we've thought a lot about at the better order project that we published on, especially as relates to UN Security Council reform in defense of variable geometry, Mr. Carney's speech made reference to what he called Naive multilateralism, and he questioned the

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utility of relying on multilateral institutions, whose effectiveness has been diminished in recent years. Now, back when Canada was rhetorically defending the rules based order, we could couch our support for the UN within our support for the rules based international order. But do you think that the Prime Minister's speech signals in some way that the UN now occupies a less prominent place in Canada's foreign policy thinking, relatively speaking, used to be really up there, but now we're talking about cooperation with different groups of countries. You know, sometimes the vast majority of countries, as he said in his remarks, but he did, you know, to some extent, denigrate multilateralism. So I wanted to give you a chance to weigh in on that?

David Lametti 24:20

Well, I think there's, I think in the fullness of the Prime Minister's speech, he did, he did mention the UN Charter and the values there. And I think there is a critique of being naive within that. So it's naive multilateralism that is problematic. It's not multilateralism of itself, in the sense that there are times when multilateral institutions and the UN as a multilateral institution work well, but there's also a recognition, and this is about not being naive, that in other cases it does not work well, and it either needs to be reformed or we need to find. Find, at least at a particular moment in time, we need to find another different path, a plurilateral path, a path with variable geometry that allows us to achieve the desired result, whether, whether it's, it's an economic result that we're looking at, whether it's a security result that we're looking at or whether it's protecting human rights.

So there is a role for multilateralism, but we have to be realistic about what it can accomplish in a given in a given case, in particular circumstances when our traditional forms of multilateralism, like the UN or a un institution, can't do the job, then we have to, then we have to look elsewhere. Let me give you an example, and it's an example that that both Canada and the United States are working on together. That's the gang suppression force in Haiti. Again, there is a, you know, the the UN Security Council for for all its imperfections, has delegated to a group of countries, led by the United States and Canada has delegated the task of suppressing gangs in Haiti. We have Canada has played a role, not just with financial support, but in in developing the process as it moves forward, Ambassador Ray did this before I got here, and now I've continued in the work we now have. We now have twice as many soldiers committed as we need. Those soldiers are being trained primarily in gang suppression. We are working on the other forms of support for that mission to succeed.

And again, so this is something that the UN has delegated to a group of to a group of countries that I think, realize that something else has to be done on the ground doesn't look like the traditional UN peacekeeping model. So it's a it's a pragmatic response. It's a necessary response. We're trying to help the Haitian people. And Haitian people are open because they're, they're, frankly, living in terrible circumstances in certain parts of the country. And so we're moving forward with a different kind of of multilateral idea that has certain countries involved and with different levels of intensity, these kinds of things. We these kinds of solutions, I think, are going to be increasingly important as we move forward, and we will identify the kinds of the kinds of potential solutions as we move forward, given the circumstances.

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Zach Paikin 27:47

A question from Isaac Baylor, and he asks that, in a world of fragmentation, where do we draw the line between pursuing transactionalism as a stabilizing force versus actually ensuring that we pursue a genuinely cooperative international environment? Is there some kind of long term vision that's needed to ensure we get the latter rather than the former? Your thoughts?

David Lametti 28:05

I think, given the complexity of the world, you have to keep both options on the table and assess which is better under the circumstances, better for Canadians and better for the world, or the world order, or human rights, or whatever, whatever larger value we're taking into account. There will be times when a transactional approach will be necessary, particularly if, if it's a bilateral trade negotiation, or there's some element of bilateral security that that needs to be, that needs to be, in some way enshrined, but there's always a there's always a virtue to larger degrees of cooperation, particularly if it leads to peace and stability over a wider swath of countries. You've got to keep both on the table. And I think what, what the Prime Minister said was, let's not be naive about this. We will, yes, use the UN, where we can use the UN, but we will use other institutions, and we will create and lead other configurations where it serves Canadians.

Zach Paikin 29:10

Is there a risk that pursuing transactionalism, that pursuing variable geometry, as the Prime Minister puts it, could that end up becoming a substitute, almost by default, for multilateral reform, and an insufficient substitute at that. And what I mean by that is our ad hoc coalition's really going to be powerful enough to solve today's global problems without tackling some of the much deeper grievances about the unequal way in which key multilateral institutions continue to be structured even today?

David Lametti 29:41

Well, that's That's a complicated question, but, but the answer is also in the complexity. And so what I would say is that part of the decision to use a transactional approach, part of the decision. Decision to use a multilateral approach will be precisely the impact on multilateralism or transactionalism as the case may be right. So in choosing one, you're not choosing the other, and, and, and to some extent, it's that not choosing of the other that's also a factor, and so you have to weigh each particular situation as you move forward, it will depend, of course, you know a transactional decision that might have an impact, a deleterious impact, on a multilateral institution, a trade institution, or the United Nations, or some other multilateral institution. Of course, you have to weigh that impact into account and vice versa.

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So there's no, there's no, I think there's no definitive answer to the way you frame that question. Recognize the complexity in the situation, assess the situation, either in the best interest of your country or with other countries, for a collective, a series of collective interests or values, and then, and then pick the best moving forward and course correct when you have to course correct. The whole point about being pragmatic is to keep your values in front of you and to move forward as best you can, to defend your interests in a variety of different places and spaces, but to course correct where you need to course correct.

Zach Paikin 31:30

If I may, that sounds like a relatively easy going and non alarmist answer, whereas the prime minister did say in Davos that, you know, we are living through a rupture and not a transition. Is there not a fear that these multilateral institutions are just going to cease to function if they don't tackle some of these major issues going forward? Is simply forging these coalitions on ad hoc basis, responding to events as they go along? Is that enough, absent a longer term vision, to actually make sure that these institutions can actually be reformed?

David Lametti 32:02

And if I, and if I have conveyed, if I've conveyed that this is will be in any way easy, I I correct that. I mean, it's, it's, this is not going to be easy. I'm trying to capture all the complexity and all the factors as we move forward. The ultimate answer to your, your larger question in this case is you still have to keep your values in front of you, and so we we still believe in human rights, we still believe in the values that are expressed in the UN Charter. We still believe in the fundamental equality of countries. We still believe in the security of borders. All of that has to you have to keep all of that in the forefront as you move forward, and in many cases, that will push us towards continuing to use multilateral institutions and to develop and improve multilateral institutions. In some cases, it won't.

And so I don't think in keeping your values in front of view that we are undermining the world order. We may depart from an institution like the UN to achieve certain purposes, but we'll still remain committed to building the best un we possibly can. My predecessor, Bob Ray, was fond of saying that if we didn't have, if we didn't have the UN we'd have to recreate it and and I think that's right, as flawed an institution as it may be, and you know, you've mentioned the Security Council, and the Security Council is one of the institutions that merits a great deal of criticism and calls for a great deal of reform, but it also remains one of the institutions that will be this, that will be the hardest to reform. And so in the meanwhile, we have to move forward with other aspects of the UN that work well, and we have to move forward with other kinds of of configurations in order to to achieve purposes of peace and security, or or or other values that perhaps don't take the Security Council into account.

Zach Paikin 34:09

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Let's talk about Security Council reform. Then you know, given some of what I was saying before, you know that there may be a risk that the failure to produce a more representative Council and a more effective Council could end up fatally delegitimizing the UN system, and by extension, it could fracture the common multilateral order that you know humanity still shares today, even you know, however imperfectly, that that multilateral order you know may be given all of that, given how high the stakes are, how urgent a priority is, Security Council reform for Canada right now, in comparison with other priorities that Canada currently has at the UN?

David Lametti 34:42

Well, let me dial back first to say that the Security Council was one of the fundamental compromises when this institution was created 80 years ago and it was based on lessons learned with the League of Nations, and really the lack of the lack of power the best. Word is lame presence in French, the impotence of the of the League of Nations to prevent war, in particular, the Second World War, from happening. And so the trade off was in order to get the big players to buy into the UN and, and after the second world war, they were the United States, China, Russia, Great Britain and and and France. In order to get the major powers to buy in, we would give them a veto, a permanent veto, and then as the the UN evolve, as the Security Council evolved, and more and more seats were added to the table, etc, those, those permanent vetoes still remained, and it has been, it has been one source of of frustration with the UN that a number of good initiatives, or perhaps necessary initiatives, or perhaps peace keeping or peacemaking initiatives, have been halted by a veto or or the inability to stop aggression has been halted by a veto.

So it it obviously remains a priority. But how do you fix an institution that was part of that was part of the original bargain, and how do you fix or amend an institution in a way that you it's hard to take away something that a country already has, and in particular, you've got three of those powers, which are world powers. And it would, it would be, it's hard. There are plans out there. It's hard to see a situation in which no one of these countries either loses its veto or has that veto watered down in any way, shape or form. So this is, this is a complicated this is a complicated matter. And Canada is working. Other countries are working. I know your your group is it has proposed ways to reform the manner in which veto is is exercised, or the manner in which the Security Council is composed, or both. All of those are on the table, and they they remain important. The there is currently, and Canada supports the current reforms that are being done to the UN both to UN budgets.

We've had, we've had a major budget cut that was negotiated at the end of 2025 that's being implemented now, we are working on mandate reform as a priority. It's it's something that can be done. There have been many mandates that have been created by the UN that are still in existence and still some way cost money and time and human resources, and yet they aren't. They either aren't delivering or there is no need for those results to be delivered anymore. So some method of reviewing those mandates moving forward and preventing dates from going on forever. And third is, is the larger question of institutional reform, whether there are, there are kinds of of, of agencies that have overlap, and reducing overlap, and running, running the

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delivery, the service delivery, part of the United Nations in a much more effective fashion. And there's a Security Council.

And I would, I would say that Security Council is the most difficult part, as with and there's there have been resolutions and proposals to reform the Security Council for a long period of time. It's important to Canada. We're working diligently. We are part of a group that has taken a stance, and we're constantly reviewing stances and proposals that have come in from either other countries or other think tanks or agencies or or experts. So let's be pragmatic about it. This will be the single hardest thing that that we do. And I think what Prime Minister Carney was telling us about naive multilateralism was we can't wait around for Security Council reform to do other things that we need to do, whether it's the protection or promotion of human rights, whether it's the protection or promotion of trade or economic interests in Canada or having promoting Peace and Security around the globe, we will, if the Security Council can act, we'll find other ways and other configurations to achieve the results that are best for Canadians and best for humanity.

Zach Paikin 39:31

Let me unpack a couple of the things that you mentioned in your answer. First, on the question of the veto, there is a perception among many UN member states, you know, particularly small member states that certain permanent members of the Security Council have abused their veto prerogatives and are no longer just using it to defend their core interests. You know, which was the primary reason why the veto was set up was primarily to prevent world war three. They're quite concerned at this point in time for them, multilateralism is real politic, and they see. The abuse of the veto is something that calls into question the legitimacy of the UN Security Council, given that, and given the Prime Minister's, you know, raising, given the Prime Minister raising the possibility of forging some kind of a coalition of middle powers, could Canada forge such a coalition with other middle powers in certain small countries as well behind certain concrete ideas to restrict the veto and the way that it's used.

And then, you know, use that collective bargaining power of that coalition against the p5 and given that the p5 aren't necessarily getting along all that well, you know, we live in an era of great power competition. You know, one or another of the great powers might want to, in fact, entertain some of those ideas in order to come off as having a better image vis a vis the vast majority of global states in order to win that competition against other powers. So what are your thoughts on that right now as a possibility? And of course, the window for such a possibility might be relatively small, given that President Trump is pursuing a reset in relations with Russia, it looks like there's a kind of tentative detente with China so far as well, and this whole framing of great power competition that was very much embraced by the Biden administration has somewhat fallen by the wayside now under the Trump administration. So perhaps you were mentioning before that that Security Council reform is something we sort of can't wait for, and we have to pursue more urgent tasks. Perhaps there's an urgent window to pursue Security Council reform sooner rather than later. Might you agree?

David Lametti 41:25

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Well, I'm certainly not going to, I'm not going to speak out of turn with respect to where the where the priorities of the Canadian government will eventually lie in the hypothesis that you just set out. Right? So if, if the opportunity presented itself, it would be there would be, obviously a discussion between the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister, other and other experts, other, other Canadian experts within government and and and perhaps wider to decide which way to move forward.

So I'm not going to I'm not going to get myself out in advance of that discussion. What the Prime Minister has challenged us to do with his Davos speech is to think about these kinds of possibilities, and that's precisely what you've done in laying out this particular hypothesis in terms of how it might have an impact on Security Council reform. I would say, as an individual or as as a scholar, that anything is possible and that the hypothesis is interesting, but I'm not going to speak in any way for the Canadian government about whether that might become a priority or not. It's too early to tell. We'll see how it goes. There's a there are UN reform processes and, and we're still, again, we're still not gonna say we're in the vapor trail of Davos still, and we all wait for the government to articulate next steps, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs to see, see where we're going next. And and I'll leave it at that.

Zach Paikin 43:03

Thank you. You did mention the group that Canada is a part in when it comes to Security Council reform, which is uniting for consensus. Uniting for consensus has stood out in particular for its opposition to increasing the number of permanent members on the Security Council quite consistently for several decades. Now, even though the majority of countries at the United Nations do, in fact want to expand the permanent membership of the Security Council.

Now, if the persistent failure to reform multilateral institutions does indeed threaten the system of international norms and laws that we all rely on, what compromises might Canada be prepared to make for the greater good of making Security Council reform a reality as it relates to the composition of the council, and particularly the permanent membership, and what compromises could Canada expect from g4 countries in return? You know, for example, could Canada live with the idea of having new permanent members on the councils, but no vetoes for those permanent members, which is something that the Biden administration also embraced towards the end of its time in office.

David Lametti 43:59

Look again, I am not going to, I'm not going to speculate on where, on where we might go with respect to actual proposals. The the group to which we belong right now believes that adding, adding permanent seats, with, with adding more permanent seats or or adding more permanent vetoes, given our previous experience over the last 80 years, is, is not helpful that being said, there is, there is an openness to discuss all the various kinds of proposals that are being put forward, to assess them, and then and then, see where we go. When, when that discussion

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happens, to some extent, it is ongoing, but when, when that discussion comes to the forefront, Canada will be open to looking at proposals.

I'm not going to say what we might trade off or but we won't that's a discussion that the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, will have, speaking to people on the ground like me and others, but also, but also discussing within. Around, you know, within, within the confines of the Cabinet Room, where they would like Canada go, to go, and where and what things they think Canada might be able to to gain or or trade off in order to make a certain result happen. So again, I'm not going to get out in front of that discussion others than to say the Prime Minister has exhorted us to think about these things pragmatically and to assess these things pragmatically in a realistic way, both within the context of current multilateral institutions like the UN but also to see other other possibilities in terms of variable geometry.

Zach Paikin 45:37

That's all very fair, although we were talking before about the good relations that Canada is trying to pursue now with countries like Brazil and India. And Brazil and India, of course, are two of the four countries in the g4 probably the two most likely countries in the g4 in fact, to get a permanent seat, much more than Germany and Japan. You know, do you think that Canada risks unnecessarily aggravating relations with those countries by our membership and uniting for consensus is that. Is that not just an unnecessary irritant? What is the fundamental rationale by which we continue to cling to this group uniting for consensus, especially if it does potentially pose a risk to our pursuit of variable geometry and resetting our relations with important rising powers like India?

David Lametti 46:20

Well, again, we're there for principled reasons that that past experience has shown that that simply adding, adding more permanent members won't, won't ameliorate the the efficacy of the Security Council. That being said, as I've just said, and you, you have, you have underlined it. We, we are trying to expand trade relations through macro Mercosur, of which Brazil is probably the key member in South America. We are. We've had, we've had a reset with India. Both the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs have visited. And so there's a new openness to building positive relationships with those countries. There's absolutely no question about that. Will that have an impact on our ultimate stand on the Security Council? I don't know. It's too early to speculate, but as I've said, we were there for principled reasons in that group. But that being said, we are open to hearing arguments and plans and potential solutions for making the Security Council a much more effective institution.

Zach Paikin 47:34

If I can push you one more time on something related to this, which is that India is the world's single largest country by population, it's going to be the world's third largest country in terms of the size of its economy by the end of this decade. It also is a nuclear power is it going to be

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sustainable for the United Nations, where, now, more than 80 years after the UN was established? Is it going to be sustainable to have a situation in which Britain has a permanent seat on the Security Council but India does not. Does that leave, you know, if that status quo continues, is the UN fit for purpose in responding to the various security challenges and status related demands in today's world? You know, it already looks relatively untenable. In 2026 is it going to be a, you know, in 2036 and 2046 etc, at some point, something's got to give no.

David Lametti 48:21

Well, first of all, I would add 1/4 bullet, which is India's probably the world's largest functioning democracy. They routinely have free and fair elections. And I think that's important to underscore in the in the in the context that you've just given. Of course, the world has changed in eight years. Of course, the economic and power dynamics in the world have changed. Population dynamics in the world have changed since, since the UN was created. And of course, there's a recognition, I think, on the part of most countries and perhaps even all countries, that that the UN has to change, and multilateral institutions have to change accordingly.

And so we It certainly is, it certainly is a factor that has to be looked at, that that India is a rising economic and political power and nuclear power and democratic power and and hopefully any reform that takes place will will take new realities, Brazil, India, into account. How that will look. I don't know how that is compared to, you know, the UK having having a veto. I don't know. Are these kinds of things, the kinds of things that will be discussed? Yes, of course. And are they the kinds of things that are being discussed? Yes, of course. There are various propositions and various proposals out there, supported by different countries, in different places, and Canada will be part of those discussions. But again, it's it would be. But. It would be impossible for me to speculate on how the you know, how the shape of it would look after a successful reform, but I can say that, of course, these are the kinds of things that need to be discussed in an institution that's 80 years old.

Zach Paikin 50:15

A question from the audience, from Robin Collins, and it's a clarifying question on one of the responses that you had earlier about the rules based international order. Now, he says the rules based international order is not the same thing as international law. One Excuse me, how would the ambassador distinguish the two terms in terms of Canada's refreshed foreign policy? Now, because pragmatism can be an argument, he says, for not strictly committing to international law. So there is certainly a criticism out there that, and the Prime Minister, of course, you know, voiced this himself in Davos, that the rules based international order, to some extent, is a deliberately opaque concept, and it allows you to claim that you are acting in defense of the order, even when you are violating international law. So in your mind, you're a legal scholar. How would you distinguish between the RBI O and international law?

David Lametti 51:03

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Well, international law is the body, the body of rules and norms that exist as a result of either formal sources of law, such as the ruling of the ICJ or international treaty, or whether it's bilateral, or whether it's multilateral, or a convention that forms the basis for those treaties. So there, there's a source that is also customary international law, which is a little harder to determine, but can have a great deal of normative weight, depending on the circumstances, and that evolves over time. And that's the manner in which states accept a norm in by virtue of the way they practice or act or decisions that they take. Sometimes there will be the interoperation of both. For example, the Law of the Sea Treaty, the United States is not, has not adopted the Law of the Sea Treaty, but accepts a number of the principles in there as customary international law, and therefore abides by them.

And in many cases, you'll get a treaty that actually incorporates a great number of things from customary international law, and puts it in writing, the international rules based order is the manner in which countries come together to discuss a number of different issues through a number of different institutions, including the development of and the application of international law, and so the rules based order is a different way in which part of the way in which the international Law is applied, but also in a sense, governance, or attempts to govern, probably the better way to put it, the relationships between states, the manner in which we tried, you know, if the charter is the Charter, the UN Charter is, is A matter of and the covenant, on, on, on, on rights is an expression of international law, the manner in which we try to protect those rights through institutions, whether it's at the UN or whether it's in front of the ICJ, that's that's part of the rules based order.

And so the two interoperate and if, if I've given the impression that you're the same thing, I I correct that both of these things will develop in different ways. Customary international law can, can develop on its own by virtue of the interactions between states, between and among states, and practices that become long standing and therefore become have normative weight at a certain point in time, to the point that it can be identified as such in, let's say, a legal proceeding in front of the ICJ, or to the extent that it convinces a country to do or not do something based on on the weight of that norm. And the same thing is true for a treaty, a treaty mechanism. That treaty may contain, a mechanism for enforcement within the treaty, a tribunal process, or whatever.

We have to chew gum and and and walk at the same time, in the sense that we we need to be able to work through existing institutions to defend, initiate, ameliorate international law norms, but also to defend the institutions, ameliorate the institutions, make them more efficient that form. Part of the rules based international order that includes a multilateral space like the United Nations, but it includes, it includes other kinds of configurations and institutions as well. Sorry for that long answer, but it is, it is a complex there is complexity here, and we need to embrace that complexity and do our best on a variety of different fronts at the same time, all the time. I'm going to repeat this every time, and I'm going to bore you to death, but keeping our values in front of us so that we have we have a guiding light or a roadmap as we move forward, and perhaps on roads that we've never taken before. Thank you, Ambassador.

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Zach Paikin 55:39

We've got about five minutes left, and I'm going to try to squeeze in two questions, if we can questions, if we can. One's from the audience, from Joel sokolski. He says President Trump has already criticized Prime Minister Carney for the DeVos speech threatening even higher tariffs. And now there's a threat even to renegotiate the new terms. To renegotiate terms rather of the new bridge crossing between Windsor and Detroit, the Gordie Howe bridge, just for the record, for our audience, Canada did pay 100% of the cost of building that bridge. Government in Michigan is going to own 50% of it, and American steel and labor were used in the construction of the bridge. And President Trump, did you know, approve this bridge and expedite its construction in his first term in office? All that aside, he asks, how much short term economic pressure can Canada take to achieve the long term? And he says vague objection objectives that the Prime Minister laid out in Davos.

David Lametti 56:26

I think it's, it's fair to say the Prime Minister has answered, has, has engaged President Trump. So I'm not going to put words in in the mouth of the prime minister or lay out a strategy for the prime minister. He has, he has ministers and a team of negotiators to do that. Obviously, I will play a role if asked, but, but he has, he has a new ambassador who will be starting in Washington, and he's got Minister LeBlanc, others to work out the detail of that Canada is a strong country. Canada does its homework. Canada prepares for negotiations. Canada, I've seen it from the inside when I was when I was in government, the last time we negotiated, renegotiated the North American Free Trade Agreement. We will be prepared this time.

And Canada has not just a lot of resources. I don't mean this in the traditional sense of resource. I mean in the sense of negotiating leverage. We have a lot of we have a lot of pluses on our side of the ledger, and we're proud of those pluses. We're proud of the way in which we negotiate, and we're proud of the way in which we we deal with other countries, and in particular, the manner in which we deal with the United States. That's going to continue, and I'm pretty confident that that this government has the talent and the capacity to negotiate the best possible deal for Canadians when it comes to renegotiating the trade agreements, and that it has the same capacity and talents to look out for Canadian interests elsewhere around the world, and to do so in a in an effective and fair manner as we move forward, I really do have a lot of confidence in this government as we move forward.

Zach Paikin 58:24

That answers my final question as well. So no need to get to it, and we're right at the hour, pretty much. So I think it's a great opportunity to wrap up the discussion right there. Ambassador, merci beaucoup, grazie, this was a real pleasure to have you today. I hope we'll be able to host you again. Thank you again to all of our audience for joining us today at the Quincy Institute to find out more about the better order project. You can go online to better order

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project.org and of course, please do register as well for future webinars at the Quincy Institute website, which is Quincy inst.org, as well. Thank you so much.

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