

The Economist logo, featuring the words "The Economist" in white serif font on a red rectangular background.**Canada's foreign policy**

Snubbed

Better at doughnuts than diplomacy

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IN 2003 Bono, a rock star and poverty campaigner, proclaimed that "The world needs more Canada". This week, the world decided it didn't. On October 12th Canada lost its bid for a rotating seat on the United Nations Security Council, for the first time since the organisation was founded in 1945. That Germany was preferred was acceptable; not so, being passed over in favour of Portugal.

Stephen Harper's Conservative government blamed the opposition leader, Michael Ignatieff, for the snub, because he had suggested that Canada did not deserve the seat. But many countries apparently share Mr Ignatieff's dislike of Mr Harper's foreign policy. This has featured outspoken support of Israel's hardline government, alienating the Muslim countries that make up a third of the UN's membership. Mr Harper has also made few friends in Africa (where he has closed embassies), or in Europe and among island states (with his feeble policy on climate change).

He came to power in 2006 sceptical of Canada's traditional multilateralism ("a weak-nation strategy", he said) and of the UN itself. Last year he raised eyebrows by choosing to inaugurate a doughnut-innovation centre rather than attend the UN General Assembly. His country's commitment to UN peacekeeping missions, for which a former Liberal prime minister once won a Nobel prize, declined sharply under the previous government and has not increased under Mr Harper.

So why bother to seek a Security Council seat? The Conservatives seem now to realise that strong links to the United States are no longer enough in a changing world. Canada is still a big UN paymaster. As host of the G8 summit this year, it pushed for more aid for maternal and child health in poor countries. But its overtures to China and India came too late to sway the vote.

The snub has handed Mr Harper's opponents a club with which to beat him. Jean Chrétien, a former Liberal prime minister, noted acidly that "In Canada, we have to realise that what you do has consequences." Pollsters say the public attach little importance to a UN seat. But this was supposed to be a year in which Canada would figure large on the world stage. It started with the winter Olympics in Vancouver and the economy's swift recovery from recession, and continued with hosting the G8 and G20 summits. It seems to have ended early.

The Americas

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