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Human Security: Protecting People
Laurier Lecture
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A Little (Recent) History

Today , I would like to discuss human security, what it is, and why Canada has had such an impact in putting the idea on the international agenda.

When Lloyd Axworthy was Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, I was the political director in the Canadian Foreign Affairs Department.

At that time, we were looking for a policy term that would encapsulate the comparatively innovative security agenda we were carrying out under Lloyd Axworthy's direction.

It was, in essence, a people-protection agenda, and included
- the anti-personnel land mines treaty,
- women's rights generally,
- the protection of women in armed conflict,
- conflict-affected children,
- the abortive Canadian-led intervention in eastern Zaire,
- Canadian participation in the Kosovo war,
- a small arms treaty,
- operational reforms of the Security Council,
- the International Criminal Court,
- and the Responsibility to Protect report that the Government of Canada had commissioned.

We knew this all worked in practice but we wanted to show it worked in theory!

We needed a simple phrase that at once explained it, "bounded" it and, we hoped, dignified it.

The honour of coining the term "human security" usually goes to the late Mabul ul-Haq of the UN Development Program, although in fact it was used even earlier by the then Secretary General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros Ghali.

In any case, the Government of Canada did not invent the term we simply appropriated it.

The Government of Canada was, nonetheless, probably the first government to embrace the term, Human Security, and to use it extensively, some might say brazenly in acknowledging no intellectual property rights, to describe a central purpose of our foreign policy.

Human security means different things to different people.

That is probably inevitable but in my view regrettable because I think as the focus broadens, the value of the concept diminishes.

The definition of the term we used, essentially the physical protection of people, is quite narrow, on purpose.

It is, also, much narrower than the more expansive meaning that was to be given to it by the Ogata/Sen Commission, established by the Japanese government.

The Japanese were uncomfortable with the implications for the Japanese constitution of the military dimensions of the Canadian approach.

They were, also, concerned about third world sensitivities with respect to military intervention even when all else failed

And, they were looking for a Permanent seat on the UN Security Council and did not want to risk offending anyone who might vote for them.

We wanted a term that would, over time, become a norm of behaviour which would encourage the protection of people, and not only of states, when their existence was threatened.

We, also, wanted a concept that would eventually stand with national security as a basic public policy purpose,

and would be accepted as a reason for military investment.

We believed that the more encompassing economic and social definitions, essentially human well-being and dignity, while entirely laudable in their objectives, would risk meaning all things to all people

and end up meaning nothing to anyone, at least nothing new and "actionable" by governments.

when everything is a priority, nothing is a priority.

In the light of humanity's failures in Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, the Congo and all the rest of the tragic taxonomy of international neglect and indifference, we saw a pressing need for an idea to galvanize action to save innocent lives.

What Did We Mean by Human Security

Our definition of human security
1. takes individual human beings and their communities, rather than states, as its point of reference;
2. uses the safety and well-being of individuals and their communities as the measure of security;
3. c) recognizes that the security of states is essential, but not sufficient, to ensure individual safety and well-being;
4. d) considers threats from both military and non-military sources (for example, intrastate war, small arms proliferation, human rights violations, and even crime and drugs);
5. e) regards the safety and well-being of individuals as integral to global peace and security;
6. f) is a complement to, not a substitute for, national security;
7. g) acknowledges that civil society makes a direct contribution to human security;
8. h) brings new techniques and new technologies to the repertory of diplomatic tools – for example, Internet communications and

non-traditional alliances between governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the International Committee of the Red Cross;

Is human security an Alternative to National Security?

The short answer is no.

States are not passé;

states have proved more resilient and more necessary than some pundits thought

Even in the emerging cyber world, order requires rules, rules require authority, and authority is exercised on behalf of people by states.

In fact, disintegrating states appear to be as dangerous to their citizens as tyrannies.

Nor would we be so optimistic or even naïve to suggest that the risk of interstate conflict is going to disappear anytime soon.

A glance at the situation in Iraq and the Middle East, the Korean Peninsula, the South China Sea, and northern and central Africa suggests otherwise.

National security and human security are opposite sides of the same coin.

Why Did Canada Promote this Idea?

The human security concept is relevant to Canadians' interests and values.

Sooner or later, directly or indirectly, the security of others becomes our problem.

Thanks in large part to having only the United States for a neighbour, Canada has always been, and continues to be, one of the most secure countries in the world.

But it is also one of the most open societies in terms of flow of goods, people, ideas, and capital.

That openness creates prosperity and vulnerabilities.

A Genuine Canadian Success Story

1. The Responsibility to Protect
2. The International Criminal Court
3. The Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict
4. The Landmines Ban

What Are the Obstacles?

1. The UN Charter and the issue of sovereignty
2. Colonial Hangover and Distrust
3. Iraq as a bad example
4. lack of resources

Human Security and Light Switch Diplomacy

From Axworthy to Manley to Graham

From Chretien to Martin to Harper

Although successive Canadian Governments never actually abandoned the human security agenda, they never pursued it again with the same sense of purpose.

Of course, the little appreciated truth of a Human Security agenda is that it takes money, a lot of money, to succeed, not least to pay for the combat-capable ground forces on whom intervention to save lives depends.

Sometimes I had the impression that Ottawa seemed to think that it was enough for Canada to be innovative diplomatically.

Ideas Were Us!

Muscles were someone else.

The Harper Government is investing in the military, which is a good thing.

But it is disinvesting in diplomacy, which is a bad thing.

Human Security was a Canadian idea.

Like all successful ideas it has a thousand fathers—and mothers.

Others will try to take credit for it.

But as the old song goes, "They can't take that away from [us], even if the current government disowns it