

Lecture

On Human Security: Protecting People

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Introduction

Today , I would like to discuss human security from a practitioner's perspective,

what it is,

why Canada had such a decisive impact in getting the idea on the international agenda,

how we “produced” the concept

and where the idea is going.

Human Security is a made-in Canada, honest-to-god, foreign policy innovation.

And success.

Although given the speed with which subsequent governments in Ottawa distanced themselves from it, you could be forgiven for not knowing that it was either Canadian or successful.

As is often the case, the human security concept has had to be validated by foreigners before we permitted ourselves to believe that it was genuinely new, and significant.

Former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair even tried to take credit for the idea in a speech he gave in Chicago in 1999, with his “Blair Doctrine”.

We appreciated the implicit flattery, but we were there first, and with a better concept and more evocative terminology.

Human Security: the Programmatic Underpinnings

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

Not coincidentally, in my judgment, Lloyd Axworthy was the most accomplished Canadian foreign minister never to win a Nobel Prize.

If there had been any justice, he would have had the Nobel Prize, too, for the land-mines convention.

Without his leadership, there would have been no convention.

Under Lloyd Axworthy's leadership, we were carrying out a comparatively innovative security agenda.

It was, in essence, a people-protection agenda, and included

- the anti-personnel land mines treaty,
- women's rights generally,
- the protection of civilians in armed conflict,
- conflict-affected children, including the issue of child soldiers
- 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: the Canadian Definition

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.

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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.

The Japanese Human Security report disappeared without much trace, partly because it sought to embrace too much and ended up embracing too little.

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

and ended up meaning nothing to anyone, at least nothing new and “actionable” by governments.

When everything is a priority, nothing is a priority.

When people are abused and dying, it does no good to promise them a long-term response to the root causes of conflict.

They have to be saved in the here and now because for them there is no long term.

Addressing the long term and the root causes is important, and necessary, but we needed concepts that immediately, or as soon as practicable, saved people from predation.

We wanted a term that signaled a shift in the angle of vision,

A Copernican shift that would promote behavioural change and promote the protection of people, and not just of states.

We, also, wanted a concept that would eventually stand along side national security as a basic public policy purpose, and that would be accepted as a valid reason for military investment.

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

Our definition of human security:

- 1) shifted focus of protection from states to individual human beings and their communities;
- 2) complemented but did not replace national security, recognizing that the security of states was essential, albeit not sufficient, to ensure individual safety and well-being;
- 3) regarded the safety and well-being of individuals as integral to achieving international peace and security;
- 4) addressed threats from both military and non-military sources (for example, intrastate war, small arms proliferation, massive human rights violations, and even crime and drugs);
- 5) and brought innovations to diplomatic practice– for example, the direct cooperation with civil society and the incipient internet-based revolution.

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

Human Security is not a pacifist doctrine.

NATO, including Canada, did not stop Slobodan Milosevic in Kosovo by dropping diplomatic notes on him.

Vaclav Havel called the war in Kosovo the first war for human security.

At its heart, what the Canadian Forces and CIDA and Foreign Affairs are doing in Afghanistan now is promoting human security—protecting ordinary people from the Taliban and other predators, including some of the institutions of their own government.

Whether our people are doing it as well as it needs to be done and whether they can succeed are other questions, for other occasions.

We never saw human security as an alternative to national security.

Nor did we think that the risk of interstate conflict was going to disappear anytime soon.

We saw national security and human security as opposite sides of the same coin.

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

Human Security has spawned:

1. The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICSS)
2. The Responsibility to Protect
3. The International Criminal Court
4. The Sierra Leone hybrid court
5. The Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict
6. The Ottawa land-mines treaty,
7. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security,
8. Ratification of both optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, [Canada was the first to sign and ratify the optional protocol on children in armed conflict; the second optional protocol was on the prevention of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography]

9. Leadership on women's rights, especially at the Beijing conference, and Beijing plus five,
10. Effective sanctions on UNITA that helped end the blood diamonds trade,

Human Security and the Responsibility to Protect

- The creation of ICISS (Axworthy, Ignatieff, Thakur)
- “Some of the best foreign policy thinking in 50 years” (Slaughter)
- The cold reception by the poor—license to intervene
- The equally cold reception by the rich—obligation to intervene
- Adoption in 2005
 - Warp speed in diplomacy
 - The “regional strategy” commissioners from and meetings in all regions
 - Track 1 ½ diplomacy
 - The intercession of Paul Martin

Human Security and Current Conflicts

- Darfur
- Afghanistan
- Palestine

Human Security and Where It Is Going

- The nefarious impact of the Bush Administration and the Iraq War
- The need for champions
 - Obama to the rescue?

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.

Interestingly,

the new US government appears likely to implement a foreign policy that has much in common with the old Canadian Human Security agenda.

According to Clyde Sanger in the New York Times last month, President-elect Obama has signaled his intention to create a greatly expanded corps of diplomats and aid workers

that would engage in preventing conflicts and rebuilding failed states.

That sounds a lot like the human security agenda that has been deliberately expunged from Ottawa's vocabulary,

Maybe if he does, the Canadian Government will support the idea again!

In any case, some of us remember where the idea came from.

And as the old song goes, "They can't take that away from [us]",

Thank You