

FOCUS

TOWARDS HUMAN SECURITY

A People-centred Approach to Foreign Policy

by David Preston

THE end of the Cold War was hailed as the beginning of an era of peace and prosperity. There was a widespread optimism that with the easing of the grip of the ideological divide, the world community would be freer than at any time in the past to turn its attention to global problems such as under-development, poverty and the environment. The reality of the past decade has been more sobering: we have seen a wide range of new security threats emerge.

In recent decades, armed conflict has taken on a different shape, often rooted in religious or ethnic discord. While the number of armed conflicts between states has declined over the last 25 years, the number of intra-state conflicts has increased. The crises in the great Lakes region of Africa, in Bosnia and Kosovo, in East Timor and most recently in Sierra Leone are only some of the more noted examples in a series of conflicts with tragic implications for the affected populations.

Individuals are increasingly the principal victims, targets and instruments of modern war. The forced exodus, the appalling brutality, the state-sponsored murders and disappearances perpetrated against thousands of innocent people — all of this underscores the fact that in our world, civilians suffer the most from violent conflict. Casualties from armed conflict have doubled in just the past 10 years. About one million people lose their lives each year.

Civilians are paying the heaviest price, from the rise in intra-state conflict and from failed states. They bear the brunt of the new practices of war — for example, the deplorable use of child soldiers or savage paramilitaries. And they suffer most from the inexpensive yet all-too-readily-available weapons of modern war, such as landmines and military small arms and light weapons.

Threats to individual security are not limited to situations of violent conflict. For all its promise, globalization has also shown a dark underside. Transnational phenomena — terrorism, illicit drugs and crime, environmental degradation and infectious diseases — are putting all of us at risk. According to the UN, organized crime syndicates gross \$1.5 trillion per year — greater than all but three of the world's national economies. These are profits made from the misery of the vulnerable and innocent.

Concept of Human Security

Instantaneous communications, rapid transportation, increasingly porous borders, and rising business, cultural and academic ties have undeniably and unalterably merged all our lives into a common destiny. The security or insecurity of others has become very much our own security or insecurity. As a result, we have both a responsibility and an interest to act when the safety of others is imperilled. Canada's promotion of human security is a response to these new global realities.

Rethinking the meaning of security has been a growth industry throughout the 1990s. In large measure these efforts have focused on expanding the list of threats to security to include issues such as the narcotics, the environment, refugees and migration and infectious diseases. To the degree that these challenges are increasingly inter-related, demanding comprehensive integrated responses, broadening the range of threats considered is absolutely essential. In essence, human security is about safety for people from threats to their rights, their safety and even their lives.

The focus on the safety of individuals raises the question about the relationship between human security and national security. Contrary to some claims, human security and state security are not incompatible. When states act in the security interests of their people, state security and human security are mutually supportive. Building an effective, democratic state that values its own people and protects minorities is central to promoting human security. At the same time, improving the human security of its people strengthens the legitimacy, stability and security of a state. The importance of effective states is clear, for where human security exists as a fact rather than an aspiration, that situation can be attributed in large measure to the effective governance.

States, however, are not necessarily guarantors of human security. When states are externally aggressive, internally repressive or too weak to govern effectively, they threaten the security of people. In the face of massive state-sponsored murders, appalling violations of human rights and the calculated brutalization of the people, the humanitarian imperative to act cannot be ignored and can outweigh concerns about state sovereignty. Ultimately, state sovereignty is not an end in itself — it exists to serve citizens and to protect their security.

Another important conceptual clarification is the link between human security and human development. The specific phrase "human security" is most commonly associated with the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, an attempt to capture the post-Cold War peace dividend and redirect those resources towards the development agenda. The definition advanced in the report was extremely ambitious. Human security was defined as the summation of seven distinct dimensions of security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political. By focusing on people and highlighting non-traditional threats, the UNDP made an important contribution to post-Cold War thinking about security.

The rival of the concept of human security over the past three years has been due in large measure to the focus on the human costs of violent conflict. Here, practice has led theory. Two initiatives in particular, the campaign to ban landmines and the effort to create an International Criminal Court, have demonstrated the potential of a people-centred approach to security. Both measures are practical, powerful applications of the concept of human security.

By focussing on violent threats, human security addresses gaps in existing approaches and suggests new responses. Non-violent threats to human well-being, such as poverty, famine, disease, population, natural disasters and environmental degradation, require urgent attention. But the conceptual tools already exist (sustainable development and human development), and global action plans have been largely agreed (particularly through the World Conferences of the 1990s). Progress in these areas now depends principally on a greater infusion and better targeting of resources. The same cannot be said about the insecurity people face due to violence. The need for a conceptual shift towards a people-centred approach to physical safety is clear. Furthermore, in spite of calls more than a decade ago for a "New International Humanitarian Order" there is no global action plan for reducing people's vulnerability to violence.

It is sometimes argued that attending to the violent threats that people face divert funds from the more basic priority of development. But human security and human development are opposite sides of the same coin. Together they address the twin goals of freedom from fear and freedom from want. Human security provides an enabling environment for human development. Where violence or the threat of violence makes meaningful progress on the development agenda impossible, enhancing the safety of people is a prerequisite. Promoting human development is also an important strategy for furthering human security. By addressing the root causes of violent conflict, by strengthening governance structures, and by providing humanitarian relief, development assistance complements political, legal and military initiatives in enhancing human security. In many ways, the concept of human security attempts to do for the theory and practice of security what human development did for approaches to development.

Canada's human security agenda is ultimately aimed at developing new concepts, adapting diplomatic practice and updating the institutions on which the international system is based, with a view to enhancing the security of all people. While there are obviously wide-ranging implications to adopting a human security perspective, emphasis is given to two particular dimensions: the protection of civilians in times of war; and the prevention and resolution of violent conflicts.

Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

As outlined above, people's safety is most clearly at risk in situations of armed violence. While the international community is generally effective in the provision of material assistance to civilians in war zones it is much less good at providing physical safety. Enhancing their safety involves a broad range of measures for improving legal and physical protection for people, with particular attention to vulnerable groups such as women, children, the displaced and the elderly. These

measures include the issuing of more robust mandates and the provision of human rights monitors for UN peace support operations, the development of a more humane and targeted approach to economic sanctions, ending impunity by bringing to justice those who perpetrate atrocities, and reducing the availability of small arms, including landmines, that most directly affect the security of people.

One of Canada's central objectives during our two-year tenure on the UN Security Council has been to make the protection of civilians a central focus of the Council's work. The Council has a central role to play in addressing this new reality. There are signs it is moving in the right direction. Last fall, the Council authorised UN peacekeeping operations for Sierra Leone and East Timor, with robust mandates explicitly involving the protection of civilians. These mandates are now being put to the test, particularly in Sierra Leone.

Minimizing the impact of violent conflict on civilians also underpins three priority initiatives for Canada's human security agenda: the elimination of landmines, the creation of an International Criminal Court, and addressing the needs of children in armed conflict.

Anti-personnel Landmines: The widespread use of anti-personnel mines has a direct impact on the security of individuals. These weapons last for decades after conflicts end and do not distinguish between soldiers and civilians. The use of these weapons has created a humanitarian crisis in dozens of countries — impeding the return of refugees after conflicts end, preventing the use of productive land in some of the poorest countries on the planet and previously killing or injuring as many as 24,000 innocent civilians each year.

In December of 1997, the majority of the world's countries joined Canada in our determination to do something about this human security crisis by signing the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction — the Ottawa Convention. On March 1, 1999, the Ottawa Convention entered into force and by the beginning of May 2000, 94 states have agreed to be legally bound by the Convention.

The Convention must be implemented in an effective manner to ensure that mined land is cleared and returned to communities, that mine victims receive assistance and rehabilitation services and that

the global ban on anti-personnel mines is universalized. Canada is doing its part through the Canadian Landmine Fund, by supporting mine action activities in places like Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Mozambique, Central America, Peru and Ecuador.

The International Criminal Court: The promotion of human security also requires the means to hold accountable those responsible for violating human rights and humanitarian law. There can be no lasting peace without justice. The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, as well as a similar tribunal for Rwanda, were established to prosecute individuals responsible for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Investigators from the Yugoslavia tribunal are gathering evidence on the atrocities committed in Kosovo, so that the perpetrators do not go unpunished.

These tribunals provided an inspiration for the creation of the International Criminal Court. In June of 1998, the international community adopted the statute of the International Criminal Court.

War-affected Children: The welfare of the world's children

prevent its emergence and to seek peaceful resolutions where prevention fails. While calls for the prevention of violent conflicts are hardly new, these are auspicious times for turning hortatory sentiments into political action. In the wake of recent crises — Kosovo, East Timor and Sierra Leone — the human and financial costs of allowing crises to spiral out of control are clear.

There can be no doubt that a responsive Security Council is an essential component of effective conflict prevention. Nothing in the Council's basic Charter mandate precludes it from taking preventive action in the pursuit of international peace and security. It does, of course, require the Council to embrace a broader definition of security, one which takes into account the multiple factors that contribute to conflict and which addresses it in its earliest stages and manifestations. It means focussing not only on aggression between states, but also on intra-state security issues such as gross and systematic human rights abuse or catastrophic humanitarian emergencies, utter failures of governance and the rule of law, and gross instances of economic deprivation.

Small Arms and Light Weapons: One key structural challenge that must be addressed if conflicts are to be prevented is the unrestricted flow of small arms and light weapons. The excessive and destabilizing accumulation and uncontrolled spread of small arms poses a major threat to international peace and security. In virtually all conflicts that have erupted since 1990 they have been the principal weapons system employed. Many millions of small arms are in circulation around the globe.

South Asia is not immune from the adverse effects caused by the excessive accumulation of small arms. These weapons find their way to insurgent groups aggravating political instability, while international arms flows traverse the region fuelling conflicts in other parts of the world.

Ultimately, the demand for small arms is fuelled by those whose ambitions perpetrate human misery. They are aided and abetted by the dubious business interests that profit from the marketplace of conflict.

Humanitarian Intervention

There can be no doubt that preventive, non-coercive action is always preferable. As suggested above, we should put a premium on improving capacity, increasing resources and acting sooner in these areas in

order to avoid the necessity of stronger measures. It remains true, though, that these actions are not always feasible and they don't always work. When they don't work, humanitarian intervention is one option.

Non-state Actors and the War Economies: Non-state actors are becoming increasingly powerful actors on the world's stage, and they have profound effects — both positive and negative — for conflict prevention. Civil society and the private sector have demonstrated the growing, positive contribution they can make to promoting human security. At the same time, other non-state actors, militias, warlords and unscrupulous commercial interests play a role in perpetuating human insecurity in conflict zones — and beyond.

One of the failures of globalization is that it has permitted the creation of a new war economy where, in exchange for diamonds and other natural resources, certain corporations provide warlords with the financial resources they need to operate — money that is funnelled back to yet other dubious businesses that are only too happy to make their profit through the illicit arms trade.

The prevention of deadly conflicts is the single most effective way of enhancing human security. This premise is equally true in reverse. Ultimately, effective conflict prevention begins with ensuring

that people are secure. Although broadening the focus of security policy from states to citizens may at first appear to be a radical shift, it is a logical extension of current approaches to international peace and security. The Charter of the United Nations embodies the view that security cannot be achieved by a single state in isolation. The phrase "international peace and security" implies that the security of one state depends on the security of other states. A human security perspective builds on this logic by noting that the security of people in one part of the world depends on the security of people elsewhere.

Towards a New Diplomacy

An emphasis on human security determines not only the objectives of our foreign policy, but also the manner in which we pursue those objectives. While this so-called "new diplomacy" is not exclusively linked to our human security agenda, the mixture of powerful ideas, persistent persuasion,

public advocacy and partnership with civil society has proven remarkably effective. Developing innovative global partnerships helps link countries, institutions and non-governmental organisations with like-minded objectives. Such coalitions between governments and civil society helped make the campaign to ban landmines a success and were instrumental to progress in adopting the statute of the international criminal court. They are harbingers of the future, demonstrating the power of good ideas and pooled resources.

This is not to suggest that traditional foreign policy priorities such as strong effective multilateral institutions are any less important. Fostering human security has likewise been the motive behind efforts to adapt existing global and regional institutions in order to integrate human concerns into their activities. This is particularly important at the United Nations Security Council. Rather than avoiding engagement, the Council, as the legitimate decision-making body for peace and security, should be actively involved in setting the rules — and limits — for international involvement in the new, admittedly more complex, situations of modern armed conflict.

Conclusion

At its core, the human security agenda is an effort to construct a global society in which the safety and well-being of the individual is an international priority and a motivating force for international action; a society in which international humanitarian standards and the rule of law are advanced, woven into a coherent web protecting the individual, where those who violate these standards are held fully accountable.

These are indeed grand objectives, and while the international community has made impressive progress in recent years, daily reports from Sierra Leone, Chechnya, Angola, Columbia or Afghanistan indicate that we are far from achieving these objectives. Much remains to be done in ensuring that states and international institutions place the security of people at the centre of their security agendas.


The author is High Commissioner of Canada in Bangladesh. The article is based on his address at the Bangladesh Institute for International and Strategic Studies, 9 May 2000.

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by Jim Davis







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