

HUMAN SECURITY = WOMEN'S SECURITY?

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The Canadian Human Security Approach – A Gender Sensitive Strategy?

Introduction

Canada's human security approach – and here I am mainly speaking of the Canadian government's approach – is likely the conjuncture of many factors, including what kind of society Canada is, how it is shaped and how it views itself, especially internationally. The approach has two dominant features: the *safety of people* wherever they are at risk and *preventative measures* through international laws and covenants. The human security agenda introduced in Canada's foreign policy in 1996 signaled a needed paradigm shift in response to our transnational or globalized reality, where everyday life is experienced by the perception of global tragedies, and our specific location is layered with multiple locations and networks. Most of us have these multiple identities so even as I make this presentation, there is a blurring as to what is specifically Canadian and what is attributable to me as a global citizen in dialogue with citizens and world cultures over the past three decades. It is this that no doubt makes so many of us feel a responsibility and obligation to address the horrific abuses of our time.

In my presentation, I want to provide a little balance to the Canadian government presentation given by the previous speaker (Roman Waschuk) rather than a critique. In that way, I hope that my comments will be helpful to the goals of this symposium. Before proceeding, there are two points to draw to your attention about Canada's foreign policy:

First, historically, Canada's foreign policy and the Canadian state have had a tendency towards what is often referred to as "soft power" diplomacy (i.e. we are not a warrior state in the sense of Eisler 1987): humanitarian internationalism, leader on women and development, on human rights, a peacekeeping role for its military and a proponent of multilateralism, being some dominant concepts. To some extent, the human security agenda is a continuation of these concepts (or some would say "these myths") but in a very different world context. Armed conflicts and the sense of fear that they engender dominate so many people's lives, particularly women's. In my own research in war-torn societies in the late 1980s and early 1990s (especially in Rwanda, Uganda, South Africa and El Salvador, Boyd, 1994), the need for addressing poverty, growing inequities, consequences of debt and damages by the harmful policies of SAPS, within a

new framework was so evident. Our international institutions, our ways of “doing development” were failing to address the central crises of our time: the rights of people to their livelihoods and to feel secure in their communities or societies; instead there was an increased militarization of societies, armed conflicts and horrendous abuses, located in the dominant warrior culture that pervaded the globe and continues to do so.

Secondly, Canadian foreign policy is always conscious that our closest neighbour and our biggest trading partner is the largest superpower in the world, one that continues to exercise unilateralism and exceptionalism in world affairs which is a different perspective and approach to that of Canada (Adams 2003). The government of our neighbour as is well-known views security primarily in militaristic terms (viz last week when President Bush visited the Philippines for eight hours before going on to the APEC meetings in Bangkok, his way of addressing security concerns was to “help modernize the military”). Canada has had a significantly different foreign policy approach, especially on the specifics of the human security agenda, from that of the U.S. (viz on land mines, International Criminal Court (ICC), small arms and most recently Canada’s formal opposition to the US-led war in Iraq).

The challenges to keep the human security agenda in practice have become more difficult and perhaps even more polarized within Canadian society and within our government since 9/1, 2001 which by the way coincides with the resignation of Lloyd Axworthy as Foreign Minister, Canada’s main proponent of the human security approach (McRae 2001 and Axworthy 2003). For example, under Canada’s new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (June 2002), refugees and asylum-seekers are facing more constraints. Also, foreign-born Canadian citizens are experiencing new insecurities due largely to the closer collaboration with U.S. security organizations (viz the case of M. Arar, a Syrian-born Canadian citizen deported to Syria by the Americans when he was in transit).

Which aspects are excellent in Canada’s human security agenda?

The previous speaker has outlined many women’s projects and gender-sensitive programs that Canada is involved in, which really do attest to Canada’s commitment to integrating gender concerns into its human security agenda; the commitment comes with modest resources and constant reappraisal.

Initially (1996-2000), Canada’s most visible approach has been a people-centred agenda that is narrowly issue-oriented, focusing on specific rights and abuse issues that transcend national political borders and that are central to women’s security, while building an international consensus, mainly through new international laws, conventions and statutes. The Anti-personnel Landmines Treaty, the International Criminal Court (ICC), Small Arms and Light Weapons

agreements, and War-affected Children conventions and the UN Security Resolution 1325 are the most noted examples led by Canada, which were developed by the Canadian government through coalition-building and networking with citizens groups, often taking risks outside existing channels and building new international alliances especially with and as a response to civil society organizations. Over the decade of the nineties, the government held many public foreign policy forums. Significantly, all of these initiatives by Canada are opposed, and often actively so, by our closest neighbour, the U.S.

Since 9/11, Canada has faced new challenges but still supports institutional mechanisms for continued advocacy, promotion and implementation on these agreements and these statutes, not just letting them remain paper agreements, as well as many women-specific projects and gender mainstreaming strategies in order to operationalize the concerns around women, peace and security in UN Resolution 1325 and outlined by the previous speaker. For example, the government has allotted \$900,000 for making the ICC better known and \$750,000 for promoting the principles outlined in *The Responsibility to Protect* (2001), another Canadian initiative with an international group mentioned this morning.

My perspective on the human security approach and its gender sensitivity grows out of two decades of action-research related to maldevelopment and war-torn societies. Currently, a team of us – community activists and researchers – under the gender and human security program are working with women refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants in Montreal and also with women mainly in the Great Lakes region of Africa, all dealing with the consequences of political violence and war (Boyd 2001 and Boyd forthcoming). Our approach to human security applies to wherever we are. Some of the indicators or questions related to gender-sensitivity that I would ask about these initiatives in Canada's human security program are:

- Does it make the lives of women and their families safer?
- Does it contribute to women's sense of security and well being within the community?
- Does it address the needs and rights of women as full citizens?
- Does it recognize the different ways men and women are affected?
- Does it deal with the source or root causes of women's insecurity?
- How far does this agenda go in making the world less militaristic or less violent?

Let me just briefly comment on two best examples before moving to my more critical points:

Land Mines centrally affect women, men and children but differently. As you know, in most agriculturally-based communities where landmines are planted, women work in the fields. They are deprived of their livelihood and any sense of security when unable to work in the fields.

The principal goal of the *International Criminal Court* is to put an end to impunity and develop a culture of accountability in relation to crimes against humanity. The ICC recognizes the differences concerning women's experiences in wartime and has made provisions in the statutes for that difference by criminalizing sexual and gender violence.

Role of Canadian Women's Organizations

Women's organizations in Canada have exercised multiple strategies, which filter through to influence the government's position directly and indirectly. They have always had a strong critique of militarism, any nuclear programs and of neo-liberal policies. If you scanned some of the newsletters of the *Voice of Women for Peace* (Canada), the *National Action Committee on the Status of Women* (NAC), the *Quebec Federation des Femmes*, or even the *Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women* (CRIAOW), you would see that *part* of the women's agenda that has been developed over the past three decades by these major autonomous women's organizations in Canada (often in alliance with the international organizations) is now being taken up by elite-political Canadian leaders and bureaucrats through the Human Security Agenda.

Are we being co-opted by the state or is the discourse simply disguising or masking some other reality or practice? There is a growing critical literature by Canadian women academics, particularly political scientists, on Canadian foreign policy from feminist perspectives (Keeble and Smith, 1999; Sjolander et al, 2003; Whitworth, forthcoming) which would suggest just that. They critique the human security agenda as being defined by mostly masculinist state constructs, and have deconstructed the discourse to examine how it ignores/ silences/ limits particular policy practices and ways of thinking and doing by women. They also argue that the Canadian government's human security approach contradicts the primacy given by the government to its economic interests and its domestic neo-liberal economic agenda, a criticism I would share. There is a strong critique of using the military (soldiers who are trained to do battle) as peacekeepers and thus calling into question one of Canada's "core myths" (Whitworth, forthcoming).

As mentioned by the government speaker (Roman Waschuk), there are also new women's groups bringing together academics, activists and government policy makers through the *Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade* (*Canadian Committee on Women, Peace and Security; Gender and Peacebuilding Working Group*) that have recently been formed to develop strategies around gender advocacy in relation to the UN Resolution 1325 and Canada's human security agenda. An important coalition of 40 equality-seeking women's organizations that was not mentioned is the *Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action* (FAFIA) which was established in 1999 to participate collectively in international activities, notably to critique globalization and the neo-liberal agenda. Earlier this year, they submitted a critical report on the condition of women in Canada and on shortcomings of gender mainstreaming in Canada

to the UN CEDAW Committee (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women), at a time when Canada has been cited as one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Such a report calls into question Canada's leading position on gender mainstreaming internationally through the *Canadian International Development Agency* (CIDA) and the *Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade* (DFAIT).

Which aspects do not go far enough from a feminist perspective?

- Gender-sensitivity training

While the efforts by Canada to date need to be commended and supported, there are areas where I feel the Canadian approach does not go far enough. Specifically, the gender-sensitive training programs discussed by the previous speaker are perhaps the most problematic. I would ask what follow-up monitoring is in place to ensure that these programs result in changed behaviour and how are peacekeepers made accountable? Is it seriously expected that a three-day course on gender can result in a meaningful understanding of the systemic discrimination that women have faced for generations, particularly gender-based violence? Another consideration is how far institutionalization of gender-sensitivity undermines the critical edge or struggle needed to pursue real transformation of the global system that contributes to increased poverty, increased violence and a militaristic culture. What does the laudable support given for the women's projects he outlined do in terms of closing off spaces or opening up new options for feminist/ women's struggles? Another consideration is why so little support is given to initiatives that are regional when this human security approach claims to work beyond the nation-state? A host of new regional women's groupings has emerged since the mid-1990s yet with little support for their peacebuilding efforts (Boyd 2001).

There are many other areas of concern with Canada's approach but I want to mention only two, which I hinted at earlier.

- Refugee policy

We also do not see enough done in terms of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons. The issues are enormously complex, as are the conflicts that are producing this worldwide human devastation. The number of people removed from the safety of their homes, the security of their livelihoods on the land and their general well being is constantly rising. Currently it is estimated that due to conflicts about 40-45 million people are removed from any source of livelihood and are stuck in refugee camps or settlements for generations (viz Palestinian camps in Lebanon where refugees are without rights to work, without rights to build houses, without rights as full citizens or in Northern Uganda where over a million people are currently displaced). Women invariably make up 70-80% of world refugees and the internally displaced. Patriarchal structures are emerging within these camps or settlements, creating

additional insecure situations for women and girls. Canada's human security agenda with its focus on protecting civilians needs to be more pro-active in introducing new principles in the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) in order to respond to this changed world context.

- Globalization and militarization/ Armaments policy

Perhaps most importantly, the human security agenda does not go far enough to address the corporate-military agenda of globalization, which has been challenged by women over the last two decades or more. Yes, Canada did oppose the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. However, corporatism (economic neo-liberalism) and large-scale militarization are just not addressed directly enough and yet in my view they are central to issues of human security because they are the root of human (= women's) insecurity worldwide. As you know, nearly 85% of the world's armaments come from the five major countries of the Security Council. In some ways, the approach of Canada consciously recognizes this power relationship and therefore developing new kinds of partnerships (i.e. the Human Security Network of 13 like-minded countries), developing covenants through international law and providing gender-sensitivity training for peacekeepers are designed to eventually make a less militaristic world. But will it? Some say in fact this approach to human security allows the world order to remain intact; that the human security agenda may actually reinforce the status quo rather than changing the range of inequities that bring about conflicts. People learn to cope, to survive and assistance is given for their survival strategies (as mentioned in the Commission on Human Security) but have women not been surviving in their adverse situations for long enough? It is perplexing that in 2003 the Commission would be supporting survival strategies for women and micro-credit programs when we have been critiquing these for nearly a decade.

I was pleased to hear the government speaker refer to the three Ds (defence, development and diplomacy) being connected. However, I would suggest a different way in which these three Ds ought to be connected. Compare the Canadian budget for the human security program to Canada's budget for defence: some hundred millions for human security compared to approximately \$13.5 billion for defence. Canada reportedly spent \$2 billion to upgrade its CF-18 fighter-bombers largely to ensure that planes can participate in bombing campaigns, using laser-guided bombs. More serious, more costly and more against Canadian public opinion is any support that the Canadian government gives to the U.S. National Missile Defence system and the militarization of space.

The defence budget or defence policies are not usually examined in tandem with foreign policy but it is important to recall that when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was pushing for the ban on use and stockpiling of anti-personnel land mines, the Minister did get the agreement of the then Defence Minister to destroy these weapons in Canada. Women's groups in Canada and elsewhere in the world have been calling for the need to integrate foreign policy with defence policies;

instead our foreign policy is integrated with international trade, often promoting the neo-liberal agenda. Defence budgets need to be more systematically scrutinized and the common framework suggested by the Commission on Human Security ought to be supported. I am told that the ICC needs about \$150m to operate over the next few years; that is the cost of 10 cruise missiles. Article 26 of the UN Charter calling for the reduction of expenditures on military armaments needs to be adhered to and the related provisions in Resolution 1325 need to be more seriously implemented. We need to raise the campaign for “naming and shaming” states and transnational corporations that produce and sell arms (and often to both sides), fueling these conflicts. Canada needs to question its export of uranium and of nuclear reactors. Canada is one of the largest producers and exporters of uranium, and is continually trying to sell its nuclear reactors as part of development. While we do not have any nuclear weapons and we have signed the *Non-proliferation Agreement on Nuclear Weapons*, in reality we are not contributing to the reduction of nuclear weapons or a safer world by having our skewed trade policy on uranium export or nuclear reactors.

- Effects inside Canada

Finally, how does this corporate-military agenda express itself domestically in Canada? Canadian citizens are facing new challenges in the coming months. Since 9/11, “Canada’s defence lobby of retired generals, pro-military academics and defence-industry associations have been pushing for closer ties with the U.S. military” and moaning about the small defence budget. Canada’s top military commander recently stated: “Canada-US economic and military integration go hand in hand”. Also, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE), Canada’s corporate power, has organized an action group of some 30 CEOs in Canada to promote greater US-Canadian military, political and economic integration. More disturbing is that Canada’s Prime Minister-in-waiting (Paul Martin) has announced his support for Canada joining the U.S. National Missile Defence system and the militarization of space, increasing our military spending and having closer relations with the U.S. government, all of which many citizens organizations, especially women’s groups, actively and aggressively oppose.

Conclusion

Strategies of Canadian feminists and different women’s organizations for the last three decades have been directed at advocacy and international coalition-building to systematically critique economic globalization, neo-liberalism and the increased militarization of the world. They are also advocating for a more generous approach to refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants. Other groups have formed to keep the gender-sensitive strategy integral to the foreign policy approach. The principal components of the Canadian human security agenda, while narrowly focused, are *partial* responses to this advocacy, focusing on rights

and entitlements issues through new international laws and covenants while supporting various peace-building projects with women (1325).

On process and approach to human security, Canada's foreign policy appears to be slowly integrating gender-sensitivity. Many elite political leaders and government bureaucrats in their discourse, their policies and actions are conscious that women have different needs in war-situations, have a different approach to peace-building, a different knowledge and experience which requires visibility and validity (as well as a meaningful seat "at the table"). But can short technical training programs go very far to redress the complex and deep-seated systemic discrimination that women have faced for generations? Do they address systemic power relations that need to be transformed?

As we know, consideration of gender has to be continually revisited. Constant setbacks require constant advocacy, negotiations and monitoring. Patriarchal oppressions are everywhere in evidence but the human security agenda though narrowly interpreted does represent a significant step towards understanding and action regarding the need to enforce especially UN Resolution 1325 to ensure women are part of conflict prevention, resolution and peace-building. Canada needs to more directly align its foreign policy on human security with major changes to its defence and trade policies. The security of women and the security of all peoples are directly related to addressing the dominant corporate-militaristic agenda that pervades our globe. Only then is another world possible.

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*Last night I had the strangest dream I've ever had before,
I dreamed the world had all agreed to put an end to war.
I dreamed there was a mighty room and the room was filled with men
And the paper they were signing said they'd never fight again.*

*And when the paper was all signed and a million copies made,
They all joined hands and circled round and grateful prayers were made,
And the people on the streets below were dancing round and round,
With swords and guns and uniforms all scattered on the ground.*

*Last night I had the strangest dream I've ever had before,
I dreamed the world had all agreed to put an end to war.*

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