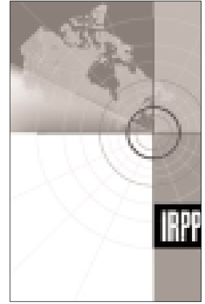
CURIOUS AMBIGUITIES: CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL SECURITY POLICY



Louis Delvoie

The rhetoric of Canadian security policy in the Chrétien years has been: strong support for the UN, perfunctory recognition of the importance of NATO, great emphasis on human rights and human security, and considerable self-praise for Canada's leading role in the world community. The reality of Canadian security policy in the Chrétien years has been: very little support for the UN, deep involvement in NATO operations in Europe, a modest measure of success in promoting the human rights agenda, and much less influential a role than we like to think. In politics, a gap between rhetoric and reality is always to be expected. But we may have reached the point where international awareness of the gap between reality and Canadian rhetoric is harming our reputation and effectiveness in the world.

Sous le règne de Jean Chrétien, le discours politique du Canada en matière de sécurité s'articulait, jusqu'ici, autour des éléments suivants : ferme soutien à l'OTAN; reconnaissance purement formelle quant à l'importance de l'Organisation du traité de l'Atlantique Nord; net accent sur les droits et la sécurité de la personne; et mise en valeur du rôle du Canada comme chef de file au sein de la communauté internationale. Mais la réalité est tout autre : un appui faiblard envers l'ONU, un profond engagement dans les opérations européennes de l'OTAN, de modestes succès dans la promotion des droits de la personne et, sur le plan international, une influence nettement inférieure à nos prétentions. En politique, certes, il existe toujours un certain écart entre le discours officiel et la réalité. Dans notre cas, cependant, cet écart semble s'être élargi, au point de ternir notre réputation et de compromettre l'efficacité de notre rôle.

The international security policy pursued by successive Canadian governments during the Cold War era was open to a wide variety of criticisms, most notably on the question of the "commitment-capability gap" evident in the manning and equipment of the Canadian Armed Forces. But the policy did have a certain coherence and unity of purpose due primarily to external circumstance. The Soviet Union was viewed as a hostile superpower and as a threat in terms of its intentions and capabilities. By virtue of its actions or reactions, it could precipitate a global nuclear war which would wreak havoc, death and destruction on Canada and its people. Countering this threat was the central purpose of virtually every major Canadian policy or action in the international security arena. This was true of Canada's engagement in collective defence and deterrence in NATO and NORAD, of our commitment to the de-escalation and containment of regional conflicts through peacekeeping, and of most of our endeavours in the field of arms control and disarmament. It was also true of various diplomatic and political actions designed to lower or manage East-West tensions, ranging from Canada's active participation in the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in the 1970's and 1980's to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's "peace initiative" of 1983-84. All were geared in one way or another to a single national interest: preserving the security of Canada and Canadians, and, by extension of Canada's allies.

The end of the Cold War changed all that. For Canada and for most of its Western allies, the fall of Communism proved that devising and implementing a coherent international security policy is a damn difficult business in the absence of an identifiable enemy or a clearly discernible threat. Given its privileged geo-strategic situation, Canada has not been able to identify any new or immediate external threat to its security in the post-Cold War decade. Nor has any consensus evolved, within or outside government, as to what longer-term potential threats should be of primary concern to Canada, e.g. a collapsing or a renascent

nationalistic Russia, a hegemonistic China, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the international narcotics trade, an upsurge in illegal migration or cyber-crime. More broadly, no clear determination has emerged as to what Canada's international security interests are, and where and with whom they lie. Without the benefit of such basic determinations, the Canadian government has advanced a panoply of security policies and positions that give rise to questions about process, purpose, content and consistency. This paper examines a few, but by no means all, of those questions.

International security policy is open to a wide variety of definitions and interpretations. Generally speaking, however, it is viewed as the "bridge" between foreign policy and defence policy and as "a lens or filter through which foreign policy informs defence policy." (as David Dewitt and David Leyton Brown put it in their 1995 book, ***Canada's International Security Policy***). With the exception of its domestic content (aid of the civil power and assistance to civil authorities), defence policy should be seen as flowing from or derivative of foreign policy. In other words, it should serve the interests and objectives identified in the formulation of foreign policy and directly complement other elements of a broader security policy.

On coming to office in 1993, the Liberal government announced its intention to proceed with major reviews of Canada's foreign and defence policies. But rather than embark on these exercises sequentially, as the logic just described would have dictated, it chose to conduct two separate and simultaneous reviews. And, what is even more curious, the results of the defence policy review were published four months before the foreign policy review was. Under these circumstances, it is not entirely surprising that there are significant divergences between the two. Without going into detail, the nub of the problem is that the major objectives of the defence policy white paper are cast in terms now usually associated with what is now regarded as "traditional" security policy while the foreign policy statement gives pride of place to objectives in the realm of the new "human security agenda." In fact, the defence white paper makes no reference at all to a "human security agenda" (although it does mention issues related to ethnic conflict, failed states etc.) The chasm between the two views is obviously deep.

Since the publication of the two policy statements, Canadians have been treated to the spectacle of a government pursuing two quite separate and distinct international security agendas. On the one hand, the Department of National Defence and much of relevant officialdom in the Department of Foreign Affairs have remained focussed on activities in the realms defence, deterrence, arms control and peace support operations. On the other hand, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and a relatively small group of advisors have dedicated themselves to launching a host of initiatives and proposals in the field of human security, and in so doing have tended to downgrade the relevance and importance of more traditional issues.

In the face of this clearly bifurcated approach, it is legitimate to ask where the priorities lie. What is the cake and what is the icing? Judging by the declarations of the Foreign Minister, one answer would seem evident. But judging by the way the Canadian government allocates its resources, another comes to the fore. The budget of the Department of National Defence stands at over $9 billion whereas the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Canadian International Development Agency devote only a few tens of millions of dollars to activities in the realm of human security. Which is the better guide to understanding the real content and intent of contemporary Canadian security policy, words or dollars?

Whatever its relative weight, it seems clear that the human security agenda has to be factored in to any assessment of contemporary Canadian security policy. What exactly is that agenda? Again, judging by the statements and papers issued by Foreign Minister Axworthy over the last few years, it would seem to include the following:

- promoting democracy, good governance and respect for human rights
- calling to account governments and leaders deemed responsible for human rights abuses
- participating in peacebuilding, peacekeeping, peace enforcement and peace restoration operations
- protecting civilians, especially women and children, caught up in armed conflicts
- banning or controlling weapons such as anti-personnel mines and small arms
- combatting terrorism, the narcotics traffic, organized crime and illegal migration
- countering environmental degradation

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and the spread of certain diseases

- addressing and eliminating the problems of poverty and illiteracy in the developing world.

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Taken in its entirety, this agenda would seem to represent a call, not for government policy but for divine intervention, since it does not fall far short of a programme for the elimination of evil in the world. But even viewed more pragmatically, it poses real policy problems. If all of these elements are to be judged integral to security policy, what becomes of aid and development policy, environmental policy, or health policy? Are there not serious risks of conceptual confusion, of anarchy in the mandates of various government agencies and of undesirable outcomes? If everything becomes security policy, does security policy in practice have any discrete meaning?

In its reach and ambitions, the human security agenda all too often makes a leap of logic from the security of others to the security of Canada and Canadians. For example, the state of the water and sewer systems of Jakarta, Calcutta and Karachi may well represent a serious hazard to the health and well-being of the citizens of those metropolises, but it is no threat to the security of Canada or its citizens. Helping to alleviate these problems would seem to have more to do with the humane compassion, international solidarity and social justice dimensions of Canadian foreign policy than with the pursuit of Canadian security objectives.

Proponents of the human security agenda also tend to underestimate the complexity of the problems they wish to address, and the nature and dimensions of the instruments and activities required to bring them to a solution. In his submission to the parliamentary committee reviewing Canadian foreign policy in 1994, Professor Denis Stairs very aptly remarked that:

> ***This drive to activism is sometimes further reinforced by an excessively optimistic view of what can be accomplished by a limited intervention over the short term. The "killing fields" behaviour portrayed nightly on the television news appears barbarously irrational. It is sometimes wrongly concluded from this that a restoration of order followed by an injection of economic assistance and lessons on democracy will bring the warring populations back to their (rational) senses. A more accurate conclusion might be that the conflicts themselves are deeply ingrained in cynically exploited combinations of unhappy history and intractable circumstance. Where such is the case, externally imposed solutions will often require massive interventions along a wide variety of the dimensions of modern government—and for periods lasting a generation or more—if they are to have even a modest chance of success.***

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Sometimes soft power is not enough:
Jean Chrétien at a NATO air base in Italy, June 1999

As Professor Stairs goes on to point out, much of what is required in fact falls into the domain of "social engineering." The sorts of commitments which the Canadian government has so far been prepared to make in these kinds of situations certainly fall far short of what might be needed to achieve such ambitious objectives.

Another difficulty presented by the human security agenda is that it is cast in a framework of universal goods and/or universal principles. An example of such a formulation is to be found in a Canadian discussion paper circulated at a recent G-8 foreign ministers meeting: "As a matter of principle, all civilians are inherently equally worthy of protection. The international community has a moral obligation to come to the assistance of people experiencing widespread and acute suffering as a consequence of massive violations of human rights, wherever they are found" (DFAIT, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: Strengthening the Norms, Mobilizing Will and Building Capacity,* Berlin, December 17, 1999, p. 4). A conventional security policy of the Cold War era aimed at the avoidance of global nuclear

war might well dictate international intervention in an Arab-Israeli conflict but not in a Uganda-Tanzania conflict, because the former posed a risk of escalation to a superpower confrontation whereas the latter did not. Such choices become far more problematic when universally applicable rationales are advanced to justify interventions. If military intervention was warranted in Haiti on the grounds that the international community could not tolerate a country's military thwarting or reversing the results of democratic processes, then why did the Canadian government not advocate military intervention in Nigeria, Algeria or the Ivory Coast in the face of essentially similar developments? If intervention in the civil wars of Somalia and Sierra Leone are explained in terms of the international community's responsibility to put an end to widespread killing and suffering, then why not advocate such interventions in the civil wars in the Sudan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan? If military intervention in Kosovo, including the bombing of Serbia, is justified on the grounds that no government should be allowed to systematically and massively violate the rights of its citizens in the course of a campaign to eradicate a secessionist insurgency, then why not bomb Russia over Chechnya or India over Kashmir? The answer to these questions may well be found in *realpolitik* or in an analysis of the so-called "CNN factor," but in the frame of reference in which the proponents of the human security agenda have chosen to formulate their principles and objectives, such specific questions inevitably give rise to broader ones. At their most benign, they refer to policy consistency. At their most malignant, they have to do with double standards.

Finally, it would also seem appropriate to ask whether the advocates of the human security agenda may not have been somewhat imprudent in their enthusiasm in declaring national sovereignty a dead or irrelevant concept when it comes to the protection of the rights of individuals or collectivities. Despite its consistent first-place ranking on the UN's Human Development Index, Canada is not a perfect society with a totally flawless record in the field of human rights. There are aspects of the Canadian social dispensation which can be used or exploited by its critics. One has only to recall the uses made of conditions on an Alberta Indian reservation by a South African ambassador of the *apartheid* era. Or again, the recent findings of a UN panel on the public funding of religious education in Ontario. In an age of international political and social activism, it is not difficult to imagine more serious challenges from abroad regarding Quebec self-determination or Aboriginal treaty rights. Canada's most natural and normal first line of defence against such challenges would be to reject them in the name of national sovereignty and non-interference in its internal affairs. However, would such a defence not inevitably be greeted with well-documented charges of hypocrisy in light of all that Canadian government spokesmen have said about the irrelevance of national sovereignty when advancing the human security agenda?

The Canadian government's defence and foreign policy statements of 1994-1995, referred to earlier, identify the UN as the most important of international institutions in the implementation of Canada's international security policy. This has remained a consistent theme in the government's declared policy in the intervening years and was at the forefront in Canada's intensive and successful campaign to obtain a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council (1999-2001). At the Millennium Summit held in New York in September, 2000, Prime Minister Chrétien gave additional emphasis to the point in describing the UN as "the world's indispensable institution." And his government has repeatedly declared that it is committed to supporting and strengthening the UN in all its endeavours in the field of international peace and security.

Given this forthright policy stance, it is curious to note that in practice the UN seems to occupy a far less prominent place in Canada's activities and commitments. In the pursuit of what it appears to regard as its major achievement in human security, the anti-personnel landmines treaty, the Canadian government chose to work with and through a network of individual governments and NGO's and deliberately to bypass the UN Committee on Disarmament. In its major military activity of recent years, the bombing campaign against Serbia, it worked with NATO in an operation not sanctioned by the UN. What is even more telling, however, is the paucity of Canada's current contribution to UN peacekeeping and peace restoration operations. As a contributor of troops and police to UN operations, Canada no longer ranks in the top 15 countries, having fallen behind, not only the United States, but also countries such as Portugal, Nepal and Guinea. In absolute numbers, Canada provides only 230 military

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personnel to UN operations, the vast majority of whom (190) are assigned, not to any of the hot spots now on the agenda of the Security Council, but to a traditional peacekeeping mission created in 1974, the UN Disengagement Observers and Force in the Golan Heights between Israel and Syria.

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This last anomaly becomes even more stark when examined in an African context. In the aftermath of the publication of the UN report on the genocide in Rwanda in December 1999, Foreign Minister Axworthy, addressing the Security Council, stressed the need for all members of the Council to devote far more attention and effort to the security problems and humanitarian crises of Africa, most notably in the Congo and Sierra Leone. He urged the members of the Council "to match our professed concern about Africa with resources" in creating a robust force for the Congo and in beefing up the force in Sierra Leone. He stressed that "the Council's engagement needs to be reinforced and sustained. We must not shirk from doing what is needed. Too often, the Council is motivated by avoiding cost and evading risk." Given this clarion call to action, it is interesting to note that eight months later, of the more than 12,000 UN military personnel deployed in Africa, only eight were Canadians. The extent of this modest commitment may well reflect a realistic assessment of what Canada's overstretched army could be expected to provide. Or again, it may reflect an accurate assessment of Canada's interests in sub-Saharan Africa, judged by a variety of standard measures—political relations, defence alliances, trade, investment, immigration, tourism etc. What it would seem totally inconsistent with is Canada's stated policy on and at the United Nations, including the stress on human security and Africa.

In the Canadian Government's foreign and defence policy statements of 1994-1995, NATO was clearly given a lower priority than the UN as a multilateral instrument for the pursuit of Canada's international security objectives. Indeed, in these documents NATO was cast in the role of a regional handmaiden of the UN, as an organization upon which the UN could call if it needed military muscle to help maintain the peace in Europe. It is therefore interesting to note that the only war-fighting or enforcement operation (the Kosovo war) in which Canada has been involved in the last five years was conducted under NATO rather than UN auspices. It is equally, if not more, interesting to note that Canada's major contributions to peacekeeping over the same period have been to NATO operations (in Bosnia and Kosovo) rather than to UN operations. As of mid-2000, Canada had some 1,680 troops serving with the NATO Stabilization Force in Bosnia, seven times more than it had in service with all UN operations combined. Here again, this imbalance may reflect an accurate assessment of Canada's national interests in the realm of international peace and security, but does it not also suggest that the policy framework and the policy rhetoric need to be re-visited?

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NATO is where the action is: Jean Chétien at the 50th anniversary summit, April 1999

There are a number of other ambiguities in Canada's current approach to NATO, but none more curious than that found in its policy on nuclear strategy and nuclear arms control. Between 1996 and 1999, Foreign Minister Axworthy instigated or at least stimulated a debate in Canada around such questions as: whether nuclear weapons are illegal/illegitimate and should be totally eliminated; whether nuclear deterrence is an obsolete concept; and whether NATO should adopt a policy of "no first use" of nuclear weapons. In carrying this debate forward, he commissioned a series of academic studies and conferences, and gave a remit to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade to hold

hearings and report back on these and other related issues. The Committee published its report in December 1998. In its response, published April 19, 1999, the government pledged "to work consistently to reduce the political legitimacy and value of nuclear weapons" and reaffirmed "its goal of a world free of nuclear weapons." It went on to say that Canada would "continue to resist any movement to validate nuclear weapons as acceptable currency in international politics."

Less than a week after the publication of this government statement, Prime Minister Chrétien attended the 50th anniversary summit meeting of NATO, held in Washington, April 23-24, 1999. At that meeting, he endorsed on behalf of the government of Canada the Alliance's new strategic concept, embodied in a long and carefully negotiated document. That document states in part that: "To protect peace and prevent war or any kind of coercion, the Alliance will maintain for the foreseeable future an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces... Nuclear weapons make a unique contribution in rendering the risks of aggression against the Alliance incalculable and unacceptable. Thus, they remain essential to preserve peace."

The new Alliance strategic concept document goes on to state that:

> *The fundamental purpose of the nuclear forces of the Allies is political: to preserve peace and prevent coercion and any kind of war. They will continue to fulfill an essential role by ensuring uncertainty in the mind of any aggressor about the nature of the Allies' response to military aggression. They demonstrate that aggression of any kind is not a rational option. The supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance...*

Is it churlish to point out that there would appear to be glaring inconsistencies between the policy which the Canadian government announced nationally on April 19, 1999 and the NATO policy which it endorsed on April 24, 1999? The follow-on question is, of course, which of the two stated positions is in fact the policy of the Canadian government?

It is not uncommon for political leaders to exaggerate their own importance or the importance of their countries on the international stage. Nor is it uncommon for them to promise a little more than they can deliver. All fair-minded observers are prepared to be tolerant of a certain amount of such exaggeration, recognizing the realities of human nature and the demands of domestic politics. But there would seem to be certain limits—however difficult to identify or define—beyond which political leaders travel at their peril, and to the detriment of their countries' reputations and interests. Have some Canadian political leaders transgressed those boundaries in their declarations about Canada's international security policy?

A specific example may serve to illustrate the point. There is no doubt that the campaign to ban anti-personnel land mines (APL) was thoroughly worthwhile, given the suffering that these weapons have inflicted on tens of thousands of civilian victims in Africa, Asia and Europe. The humanitarian logic behind the movement was compelling. There is also little doubt that Canadian leaders and diplomats made an important contribution to the negotiation and conclusion of the APL treaty of 1997. Recognizing these facts is one thing, however; proclaiming the success of a great Canadian initiative, as Canadian leaders have been wont to do, is another. On the one hand, as Professor John English has amply demonstrated, Canada was very late (1996) in joining a movement that was launched in the early 1990's by the International Committee of the Red Cross, joined by an ever-growing network of NGO's, and actively supported for several years by a number of governments, including those of the United States, France, Belgium, Norway and Sweden. On the other hand, the APL treaty has not yet been adhered to by the world's four largest military powers—the United States, Russia, China and India. Under these circumstances, is there not a risk that Canadian government rhetoric may alienate or irritate other governments and organizations which can legitimately claim a significant share of the credit for what was achieved? Is there not also a risk of undermining the APL campaign itself by proclaiming victory at a time when the campaign remains a work in progress, and will remain so until the four countries that matter most have signed on to the treaty?

If overblown rhetoric on individual issues can prove counterproductive, the risks inherent in an ever-widening "rhetoric-resources gap" across a broad range of issues are even more unpalatable. The fact is that Canada's military, aid and diplomatic resources were allowed to decline sharply throughout the 1990's while its professed international security agenda grew exponentially. The shortfalls on all fronts have

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been well documented by scholars and journalists alike. To cite but one example: A short but biting review of Canada's contemporary posture in international development assistance is to be found in "Canada: Not so caring" in *The Economist*, January 9, 1999. It points out that Canada's official development assistance declined from 0.44 per cent of GNP to 0.29 per cent of GNP between 1992-93 and 1997-98.

And yet, no end is in sight to the expansion of the agenda. The latest and perhaps most ambitious iteration of the government's human security agenda (published in September 2000) is accompanied by the commitment of a paltry additional $50 million over five years. And, not content to multiply new initiatives and proposals in well-established fora such as the UN, the Organization of American States and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Foreign Minister Axworthy was instrumental in creating a new Human Security Network, consisting of an odd assortment of 12 countries in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America, to float yet more new initiatives.

The scarcity of resources and their dispersal over an ever-expanding "security" landscape is of profound concern to some proponents of traditional security policy, who consider that genuine threats to Canada's security interests are being neglected in the process. But the damage being done to Canada's international reputation is also of deep concern to strong supporters of the human security agenda. Thus David Malone of the International Peace Academy commented recently: "Foreign and defence policy cannot be conducted on the cheap indefinitely. Canada's international credibility rests not only on imaginative policy initiatives (of which Mr. Axworthy has launched an impressive number), but also on our ability to help implement them and to share financially the burdens of international action."

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Another eloquent advocate of the human security agenda, Robin Hay, is even more blunt in warning about what will happen if this situation is not soon corrected: "Canada can expect to be laughed out of the room when it lends its voice to any serious discussion of security, human or military, soft or hard."

All of this gives rise to two questions: First, does Canada need more resources or less security policy, or both? Second, if appeals to realism are inevitably rejected with scorn by the disciples of the new faith, how about an appeal for a modicum of modesty or humility in the interests of Canada's international credibility, to say nothing of the self-respect of its citizens?

An examination of other aspects of Canada's current international security policy would undoubtedly produce other ambiguities and other questions. Those cited in this paper would seem sufficient, however, to suggest that the policy is in serious need of repair, if not re-invention. While a foolish consistency may indeed by the hobgoblin of little minds, a measure of coherence and of proportionality between ends and means would nevertheless seem desirable if policy is to achieve objectives that are in the national interest.

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