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Linking Ethics and Security in Canadian Foreign Policy

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The relationship between “ethics” and “security” is one of the most important problems of international relations. Scholars and practitioners have debated the nature of the linkage between ethics and security since the time of the Peloponnesian War in ancient Greece.¹ The theoretical tradition of realism in international politics has historically treated “security” as “synonymous with the security of the state against external dangers, which was to be achieved by increasing military capabilities.”² Seen through the lens of the Cold War nuclear competition between the superpowers, realist scholars emphasized the exclusion of ethical from security considerations in foreign policy. Critics argued that this narrow approach to security led to a paradoxical failure: the pursuit of national security was ultimately not able to provide security from many of the threats that appeared on the horizon. These included, for example, resource shortages (such as the 1970s oil crisis), civil war and conflict, threats to human rights, global warming, and destabilization caused by poverty and famine. In addition, globalization appeared to make the notion of a “hard shell” of national sovereignty and national security increasingly problematic in the context of rapid global communication and exchange. These tensions led critics of the traditional approach to articulate more positively the nature of the linkages between ethics and security considerations in international relations, and specifically in foreign policy decision-making processes. Efforts to understand the nature of these relationships have been considerably more notable in, although are not exclusive to, the post-Cold War era.

Just as the meaning of “security” has been a subject of intense recent debate,³ so the concept of “ethics” has also received more attention in recent years. In the study of international relations, and of foreign policy specifically, scholars and practitioners have taken note of the intrinsic importance of values, norms, and ethics in shaping the processes of decision making. Analysts have argued that decision makers must distinguish between multiple threats, identify different or similar circumstances, interpret information,

and rank values that need protection – all of which involves making “ethical” judgments that draw upon explicit or implicit normative sources or codes. Although the study of ethics “resists reduction to a single theory or method,”⁴ in general it seeks to analyze these various systems of morals and values, and to investigate the ways in which they affect international relations. What kinds of “values” are represented? How effective are they in decision-making processes?

As globalization has produced more complex interlinkages among states, civil society actors, and individuals, it has challenged the traditional categories (particularly the notions of Westphalian state sovereignty) through which international relations are studied. The tensions between levels of analysis, therefore, pose particular problems for students of ethics. How and in what domains or levels should ethical issues be determined? What are the “sources” of ethics and values and how are they derived? In the “procedural,” or “positive,” view, ethical codes are developed in clearly established written documents, such as treaties, agreements, protocols, or international declarations. A second, or “comprehensive,” view argues that ethics are derived from universal foundational principles, such as the “natural law” of human rights, often seen to be the basis of written codes such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These distinctions have implications for how, in an era of growing interdependence, we define our obligations and duties vis-à-vis those who live beyond our borders.

Other important questions have centred on the scope for ethical decision making in the post-Cold War era. Should “ethics” be approached narrowly or broadly in foreign policy and security policy? While neorealist scholars emphasize the continued importance of the national interest (narrowly defined) as a guiding principle, critics have taken a larger view, arguing that “state interests are defined in the context of internationally held norms and understandings of what is good and appropriate.”⁵ An expansive agenda provokes cautious consideration of commitment, resources, and effectiveness in decision making. Selectivity, on the other hand, begs the question of the normative criteria by which issues or problems are identified and acted upon.

Debates continue in the post-Cold War era about the derivation of ethics, its scope in international affairs, and its meaning in a world of diverse cultures, languages, values, and religions. While the contributors to this volume do not agree on a common approach to questions of ethics and/or security, their contributions share a common recognition that attention to ethical questions is important to an understanding of Canadian foreign policy issues. In this sense, then, there is a shared recognition of the fact that, as Nardin et al. point out: “to think ethically is to move back and forth between the general and the particular – to draw upon general principles in reaching particular judgments and decisions

and, at the same time, to revise those principles in the light of the particular circumstances in which they are used. Ethics involves principles but it also involves interpretation, choice, and action."⁶

Human Security

Recently, the concept of "human security" has gained some currency in Canadian foreign policy, and this shift provides an important problematique for these contributions. Human security suggests that environmental (ecosystem), economic, social, political, and cultural security are all necessary dimensions of security policy. It develops a notion of society interests as independent from states' interests. Following this logic, this redefinition of security "proposes that states move away from the unilateralism that typifies traditional national security policies toward a more collective and co-operative approach."⁷

Human security seeks to expand the security agenda to enable states to address more fully the global problems caused by increasing levels of interdependence. As Canada's former minister of foreign affairs, Lloyd Axworthy, states: "as borders become increasingly porous, and Cold War threats fade, foreign policy practitioners deal increasingly with issues directly affecting the lives of individuals: crime, drugs, terrorism, pollution, human rights abuses, epidemics, and the like."⁸ Canadians have traditionally responded to this interdependence with a high level of support for multilateralism and commitment to the values of democracy, peacekeeping, and human rights. These values are in turn rooted in the general philosophical idea that "the most fundamental requirement of any system of political morality, whether domestic or international, is that institutions should respect the equal moral standing, or one might say, the equal moral worth of everyone whom they affect."⁹ In this sense, the concept of human security is rooted in the Western tradition of liberal cosmopolitan ethics and, therefore, is not necessarily "new" or unique to the post-Cold War era.

The concept of human security as a universal, interdependent, people-centred system of protection from threat has recently been developed internationally in the United Nations Development Program's 1994 *Human Development Report*¹⁰ and in former UN secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali's *An Agenda for Peace*.¹¹ The concept dates back as far as the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,¹² and it has echoes in the Brundtland and Brandt Commission Reports of the 1980s as well as in the Conference on Security and Cooperation agreements in Europe in the 1970s.¹³ In Canada, the International Development Research Centre's publication *Beyond Development Cooperation*,¹⁴ the 1994 Special Joint Committee's report on Canada's foreign policy,¹⁵ and the many policy statements of Foreign Minister Axworthy appear to have embraced and promoted this concept as an ethical guide to foreign policy.

However, at the broader level, the world's institutions and structures, including the United Nations and those of its agencies that have espoused human security, continue to reflect the unequal Westphalian divisions of political sovereignty as well as global structural inequalities of power and wealth. As a result, within this context, human security has come to have ambiguous, selective, and even contradictory meanings, and it has been unevenly integrated into foreign policy decision making. As many of the contributors to this volume point out, it is important to be cautious in assessing the impact of this concept in policy terms, in Canada and elsewhere.

Critics of the human security agenda argue that state sovereignty persists as the defining feature (or norm) of international politics following the Cold War and that lack of attention to state structures and interests can result in the neglect of such important causes of insecurity as "failed states."¹⁶ However, it is equally clear that states themselves, with their concentration of resources and power, can represent great threats to human security. This became particularly clear, for example, in the cases of Rwanda and Yugoslavia, where leaders perpetrated or condoned massive systematic violations of human rights.¹⁷ Furthermore, critics argue that an over-reliance on military instruments and the use of force, fuelled by changing technologies and a global media culture oriented towards swift but perhaps "shallow" action, compromises rather than reinforces the principles of human security.

More generally, there are questions about the priorities extended within the human security agenda. The 1994 Human Development Report listed among its major concerns, in addition to the protection of human rights and individual security, the urgency of addressing economic security (security of income and of work); food security (an adequate distribution of food and the necessary purchasing power); protection against threats to public health; and protection against environmental degradation, pollution and disasters. However, in contrast, much of the human security agenda in Canada and elsewhere has downplayed economic and social concerns, focusing instead on the protection of individual security from violence. This limited response to the structural challenges of global distributive problems reveals a conservativeness in policy approaches.

Whether or not "human security" will continue to resonate both in Canada and abroad is an open question. In general, one must agree with Robin Hay that, although many critics do not disparage the notion of human security in principle, they are cautious about its adoption as "a major plank of Canadian foreign and security policy."¹⁸ While offering the promise of integrating ethical concerns into traditional security concerns, human security only partially addresses the tensions between national security and ethics. Addressing these problems involves developing a clearer

analysis of what human security represents and the wider questions of ethics and decision making that it entails. What have been the changes (or lack thereof) in the ethics/security nexus given the transition from a Cold War era to a post-Cold War era? What is the meaning, importance, or relevance of the “new” concept of “human security”? Sorting out the variety of interpretations and meanings of human security, as well as the specific impact it has had on decision making, are thus central challenges addressed by the contributors to this volume.

Chapter Overviews

The contributions to this volume reflect upon the broader meaning of the changes described above for Canadian foreign policy in the twenty-first century. They address three sets of themes: (1) the meaning of “ethics” and “security,” (2) the question of historical continuity and change (more specifically, the impact of the post-Cold War context), and (3) the implications of these shifts for Canadian foreign policy. Chapters tend to mix the theoretical with the concrete. In general, however, the volume moves from the conceptual issues of ethics and security (dealt with in Parts 1 and 2), through the more pragmatic and practical questions of Canadian foreign policy decision making (dealt with in Parts 3-6), to reflections on the issues raised in the work as a whole (Part 7).

The contributions in Part 2, “Ethics and Security: Conceptual and Analytical Issues within a Changing Global Context,” focus on the conceptual questions of “ethics” and “security,” while taking account of historical and policy factors from a Canadian perspective. Taking the explicitly normative position that “without an explicit ethical basis, any definition of security is meaningless,” Jorge Nef begins the discussion with an examination of the historical foundations for reformulating the meaning of ethics and security. Using a core-periphery analysis that resists a state-centric approach, Nef suggests that a broadening foreign policy agenda should include the concept of “mutual vulnerability,” whereby “the weakness of the periphery increases the exposure of the centre.” Using this framework, Nef analyzes such non-traditional threats as crime and counter-crime, terrorism and counter-terrorism, neoliberal globalization, growing civil wars, and neofascism. He discusses the implications these new threats may have for Canada.

Complementing this normative approach, Peter Penz assesses a range of theoretical levels and perspectives, using the issue of development assistance to illustrate the assumptions and implications of each. Drawing on moral and political philosophy, Penz evaluates the ethical requirements of realism, sovereigntism, and cosmopolitanism regarding relations among states and among people across borders. Opting for a cosmopolitan approach, he argues that it is not a singular ethic but, rather, a framework

within which different ethical notions, such as those of maximizing well-being, equality, and self-determination, compete. His own approach involves a radical interpretation of obligations concerning human security. Concerning the issue of setting conditions on the provision of development assistance, Penz uses the non-state-centric cosmopolitan ethic but recognizes the particular implications of having to work within the institutional structure of the state system. The discussion concludes with implications for Canadian development-assistance policy. He accepts a limited form of conditionality in the provision of development assistance rather than wide-ranging human-rights conditionality.

The above chapters demonstrate the different ways in which scholars can approach the conceptual questions of “ethics” and “security” in the study of foreign policy. In the next part, contributors focus more on specific dilemmas faced by decision makers, using case studies to provide insights into the processes, outcomes, and implications of decision making. The case studies address bilateral and multilateral levels, reflecting the increasingly complex linkages between domestic and foreign policy decision making. They also focus on the ethical dilemmas provoked by changes in the post-Cold War era, many of which are emerging from a shift from an East-West to a North-South nexus. While confronted by complex emergencies such as those in Haiti or Africa, decision makers must also cope with more persistent long-term structural inequalities in global order. This growing inequality places issues of development assistance into the policy agenda. The themes of ethics and security in Canadian foreign policy are particularly salient when seen against this historical background.

Public support for, and official advocacy of, Canadian international development assistance has long been founded on the belief that Canada has obligations towards those countries that are vastly poorer than it. If any aspect of Canadian foreign policy is likely to reflect ethical values *prima facie*, then we might expect it to be Canadian foreign aid. Yet very few scholarly studies of Canadian aid policies have suggested that ethical values have been a key determinant of Canadian aid policies.

In Chapter 4, Cranford Pratt looks afresh at the question of the role of ethical values in Canadian aid policies. Although finally deciding that international economic and political interests have again become the dominant determinants of Canadian aid policies, he suggests that, between 1966 and 1976, a confluence of circumstances resulted in public policies on development assistance that seemed to justify the hope that ethical values were having an increasing and decisive impact upon them. Pratt argues that that confluence then dispersed. Although Canadian ethical values have continued to have some impact on Canadian development assistance policies, he suggests that dominant class interests and Canadian international political interests have reasserted their primacy as the determinants of

these policies. If this is true about foreign aid policies, he concludes, then how much more likely is it that other components of Canadian foreign policy will be even less responsive to the needs of those living beyond our borders?

Heather Smith continues the discussion by suggesting that, although the human security agenda is broad, Canada's human rights stance has been less "expansive" than "limitationist," and that this has compromised the cosmopolitan, ethical notion of human security. Niche diplomacy, which prioritizes the "economic pillars" of comparative advantage, efficiency, and maximum impact in the national interest rather than broader human security, represents the practices underlying Canadian foreign policy, she argues. Her recommendations and conclusions focus on the necessity of improving credibility in Canadian foreign policy by making "a genuine commitment of aid to meet the basic needs of those beyond our borders."

Terisa Turner and her co-authors examine the exploitation of local women farmers within the context of a "male deal" with the forces of globalization – a deal through which the commodification of nature, commonly held resources, and human labour has expanded. By questioning the moral equations of intervention, structural adjustment policies, and neoliberal free trade, the authors challenge the idea that food security is found in traditional notions of development and suggest that foreign policy should include a concern with sustenance rights. They conclude that "an ethical foreign policy consistent with human rights must be a policy that supports the strategies of rural women for strengthening the sustenance economy."

The contributors to Parts 4 and 5 develop the contentious issues of humanitarian law and intervention, focusing first on the "soft power" instruments of norms and law, and then on the dilemmas of bilateral and multilateral intervention to support human rights and democracy. W. Andy Knight argues that, as a "norm entrepreneur" working together with other "like-minded small or middle powers," Canada has used "soft power" and moral suasion as part of its expanded "human security" agenda to attempt to establish an international criminal court. Pointing to historical changes that have heightened threats to individuals, the international community has been spurred to develop the legal machinery to deal with the perpetrators of genocide, crimes against the peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Knight points out that Canada has, as part of its humane internationalist posture, traditionally cultivated the possibility of contributing to the development of international humanitarian law. And he argues that it should continue to do so if it wishes to remain a significant player on the multilateral scene.

David Black's chapter, in contrast, focuses on the politics of differentiation in human rights norms. Black uses a comparative analysis to examine the ways in which normative differences have influenced Canada's human

rights strategies in South Africa and Nigeria. This line of analysis suggests that norms (as distinct from geo-political or economic pressures) play an important role in facilitating or constraining foreign policy. The nature and impact of dominant norms varies over time and between and within subsystemic communities. This suggests a need for a better understanding of how diverse normative contexts affect Canada's ability to support and enforce broader norms of human rights and democracy as well as a more nuanced approach to decision making.

Andrew Latham uses a genealogical approach to shed light on the sources of the ethical standards that sometimes shape foreign and security policy. His analysis focuses on how a global "standard of civilization" came to be applied during the 1997 "Ottawa Process" to ban anti-personnel landmines. Resisting the traditional dichotomy between "ethics" on the one hand and "interest" and "power" on the other, Latham seeks to illuminate the way in which the "national interest" sometimes comes to be understood in terms of the promotion of "ethical" security policies that are constructed at the global level "rather than simply emerging out of a country's domestic cultural or political milieu." His analysis thus points to the global sources of ethical standards and "the politics of stigmatization" that have driven the anti-landmine campaign and the formation of Canadian foreign policy on this issue.

In Part 5, we see that humanitarian intervention, democratization, and the related concepts of peacebuilding and peace enforcement, which have been a recent focus of Canadian foreign policy, are activities that generate particularly difficult ethical dilemmas. Howard Adelman argues that in situations of complex emergencies, such as the refugee crisis in Zaire, the "unwillingness of interveners to act unless there is a crisis" has contributed to the international community's inability to choose among competing values. For Adelman, such ethical decisions are, of necessity, contextual and entail the development of meta-ethical "complementary second order norms": correspondence, coherence, control, consistency, and context. In this sophisticated assessment, ethical choices go beyond the simple state/individual or realist/moralist dichotomies to encompass the need to rank ethical values in a pragmatic way. Adelman concludes that Canadian internationalism should, therefore, become more effective with regard to context analysis and with respect to making the difficult judgments that are concomitant with taking into account competing moral perspectives.

Tom Keating complements Adelman's analysis of the complex normative issues in Zaire with a case study of Canadian experiences in Haiti. Keating, like Adelman, reflects critically on the interventionist climate of the post-Cold War world order, arguing that problems of promoting democracy in Haiti exemplify a fundamental ethical dilemma: how to maintain both an "ethics of responsibility" and an "ethics of commitment." Keating argues

that there are inherent limitations imposed on projects of humanitarian intervention and that these include, among others: the intrusion of material interests on humanitarian goals, the costs of long-term commitments, and the tendency to impede the development of indigenous social movements. Consensus, coordination, capabilities, and conviction are all essential prerequisites if Canada is to develop “an effective ethically informed intervention.”

In Part 6, we see that nuclear technologies and natural resources present ethical and security dilemmas that cross over political, social, economic, and ecological boundaries. Duane Bratt argues that, rather than acting at “cross-purposes,” “security and ethics have worked in tandem to constrain the export of CANDUs.” The result, in the post-Cold War era, has been that “the division is now solely between economics and security/ethics.” While narrow or material interests often seem to be paramount, it is inevitable that the complex international relationships created by trade in CANDUs give rise to wider concerns. In analyzing CANDU sales to Turkey, Argentina, South Korea, Romania, China, India, and Pakistan, Bratt concludes that the expected rise in ethical considerations will, primarily, be a by-product of economic considerations.

As new technologies, including nuclear technologies, are revolutionizing traditional security dilemmas for decision makers, so resource scarcity problems are pointing to increasingly complex ethical and security challenges. Peter Stoett’s study of the turbid dispute examines the interplay of traditional statist politics and evolving international norms in global ecopolitics. He suggests that international conservationist norms of precaution and equality can be reinforced by unilateral state action, even when motivated by “national interest” and domestic concerns. The risks of doing so, however, are high, and include the loss of credibility on future issues of international law. He concludes that, if Canada is to meet the challenges of environmental security, then it will have to overcome short-term thinking and strive for “progressive domestic problem solving,” which includes paying attention to habitat preservation.

Concluding Comments

An increasingly interdependent and turbulent global order provokes questions surrounding the sources of ethics and ethical codes, the scope for ethical decision making, and the meaning and implications of “ethical” approaches to security. Such questions will continue to be approached in different ways, at different levels of analysis, and with different assumptions concerning the sources, explanations, and implications of the ethics/security nexus. As suggested above, just as the processes of decision making inevitably provoke questions regarding the role of ethics and values in international relations, so do specific historical examples and real-world

case studies provide clues to the meaning and significance of abstract concepts such as “human security.” The relationship between ethics and security, the meaning and application of the concept of human security in the context of ethical debates, and the practical questions of what these linkages imply for decision makers are thus intimately connected. While analytical and methodological issues concerning the meaning of ethics and the questions of security are sometimes cast in abstract terms, with few linkages to policy, the themes of this book have been designed to provoke consideration of the ways in which theory and practice are linked; to encourage us, in Nardin’s terms, to “think ethically”; and to move back and forth from the general to the particular. This suggests the need to examine both the “ends” and “means” of policy, and to consider both prescriptive and descriptive perspectives. The purpose here is not necessarily to provide definitive answers to these complex questions but, rather, from a Canadian perspective, to promote clear and critical thinking about the meaning of the linkages between “ethics” and “security,” both in theory and in practice.

Notes

- 1 See, in particular, Thucydides’ “The Melian Dialogue,” in *Classics of International Relations*, ed. John A. Vasquez (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 9-14.
- 2 J. Ann Tickner, “Re-visioning Security,” in *International Relations Theory Today*, ed. Ken Booth and Steve Smith (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 176.
- 3 See, for example, Keith Krause and Michael Williams, eds., *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap De Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1989); Ken Booth, “Security and Emancipation,” *Review of International Studies* 17, 4 (1991): 313-26; Jessica Tuchman Mathews, “Redefining Security,” *Foreign Affairs* 68, 2 (Spring 1989): 162-77.
- 4 Terry Nardin and David R. Mapel, “Ethical Traditions in International Affairs,” in *Traditions of International Ethics*, ed. Terry Nardin and David R. Mapel (New York, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 3.
- 5 Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 2.
- 6 Nardin and Mapel, “Ethical Traditions in International Affairs,” 5.
- 7 Mark Charlton, “Is Security Really Being Redefined in the Post-Cold War World?” in *Cross-currents: International Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, ed. Mark Charlton (Scarborough: ITP Nelson, 1999), 255.
- 8 Lloyd Axworthy, “US Urged to Bolster Weak Support for UN, Human Security, and World Criminal Court,” *Canadian Speeches* 12, 3 (June 1998): 8-12.
- 9 Charles R. Beitz, “Recent International Thought,” *International Journal* 43, 2 (Spring 1988): 191.
- 10 United Nations Development Program, in *Human Development Report 1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- 11 Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace* (New York: United Nations, 1992). This theme has also been recently extended and championed by Boutros-Ghali’s successor as UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan.

- 12 Timothy Donais, "Of Soft Power and Human Security: Canada and the UN Security Council," *Peace Magazine* 15, 2 (March-April 1999): 18-19.
- 13 Paul Heinbecker, "Human Security," *Behind the Headlines* 56, 2 (December 1998-March 1999): 4-9.
- 14 Fauzya A. Moore, *Beyond Development Cooperation: Toward a New Era of Global and Human Security: IDRC report on a conference organized by the Society for International Development, 15-16 October 1993* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1994).
- 15 "Report of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons Reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy," in *Canada's Foreign Policy: Principles and Priorities for the Future* (Ottawa: The Committee, 1994).
- 16 Fen Osler Hampson and Dean F. Oliver, "Pulpit Diplomacy: A Critical Assessment of the Axworthy Doctrine," *International Journal* 53, 3 (Summer, 1998): 379-406; see also Kim Richard Nossal, "Pinchpenny Diplomacy: The Decline of 'Good International Citizenship' in Canadian Foreign Policy," *International Journal* 54, 1 (Winter 1998-99): 88-105.
- 17 Edward Broadbent, "Rights Must Transcend National Sovereignty and Global Trade," *Canadian Speeches* 9, 2 (May 1995): 36-39.
- 18 Robin Jeffrey Hay, "Present at the Creation? Human Security and Canadian Foreign Policy in the Twenty-first Century, in *A Big League Player? Canada Among Nations 1999*, ed. Fen Osler Hampson, Michael Hart, and Martin Rudner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 224.

