



# RETHINKING CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL PRIORITIES

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# CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL PRIORITIES

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It has become a truism to talk about failed and failing states, but it is necessary to examine carefully the context in which Canadian international policies will be executed in the upcoming years. In many parts of the world, the nature of states and their relationships to their peoples are changing from the Westphalian notion of states to rather loose connections of groups, tribes, and clans whose people shift allegiances from time to time. In this context, governments do not have the monopoly of coercive power we have traditionally thought a necessary attribute of a functioning polity.

In this context, Canada and the international system of institutions, in addition to dealing with states and governments, will also have to find new ways of relating to some rather loose collections of people, as opposed to governments as we have come to know them. Somalia provides a sobering example of such a geographic entity, as, some would argue, does Afghanistan, and the eastern Congo.

Recent experience also teaches us that within such geographic areas violence is likely to increase, creating and/or exacerbating deplorable living conditions for the people residing in them. Military or security engagement by external actors will have to adapt.

Despite the best efforts of traditional overseas development, the majority of the poor people in the Third World continue to be poor. Issues of climate change, raised and discussed at the recent Copenhagen conference, are also part of the context in the next five years, as are problems of food scarcity, poverty, illness, and lack of education in many parts of the world.

The new US administration has re-engaged with the United Nations (UN) system and has given priority to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.



## The Humanitarian Imperative

When massive numbers of civilians are put at risk by violence or natural disasters, how and when does Canada intervene? How and when do we help?

We should begin by giving more support to the UN agencies charged with protecting vulnerable people—e.g., UNHCR (United Nations Agency for Refugees), WFP (World Food Programme), UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), and others. In addition, we should make provision for the non-governmental executing agencies to carry out their work. Ongoing support to the major NGOs working in the field would ensure more effective implementation of their mandates, and allow Canadians to participate in assisting those in distress.

Cooperation between civilians deployed in emergency or humanitarian situations and the military is essential. Each has its areas of expertise and they often depend on one another. Civilian actors need the security which only military personnel can provide; the military needs civilians to provide humanitarian assistance, which is likewise a skilled undertaking and can best be provided by civilians. The blurring of these functions is detrimental to both groups, as well as to recipients.

Canada led the way with the “Responsibility to Protect” resolution, but concrete results from its adoption are difficult to find. Now is the time for us to put more time, effort, research, and thought into ways and means of enhancing the principles and actions which flow from the notion of protecting innocent people from the vagaries and violence which accompany power struggles in these and other situations.

## Overseas Development Assistance

Canadian overseas development assistance (ODA) should be .7 percent of gross national income (GNI)—it is currently .32 percent. In the next ten years, Canadian development assistance should increase until it reaches the .7 percent number.

But along with those increases should go major changes in the way foreign development assistance is allocated:

- a) Smarter aid should draw on the experience of “Making Markets Work for the Poor,” where the application of business development assistance, along with market-driven forces, has raised the income of small subsistence farmers and entrepreneurs in the developing world. In addition, poor people should be assisted to find ways of leveraging financial resources through land title, loans, and technical assistance, so as to make major increases in their income, instead of by small incremental amounts, which has been the case with traditional development assistance.



- b) Development assistance that counters the impact of climate change should also be a priority. Even if we begin to take serious actions to reduce carbon emissions, we know that there will be significant increases in temperature, with resulting rises in sea levels, along with drought. The poor in developing countries will be greatly impacted, and adaptation programs that assist them to cope, such as using more drought-resistant crops or altering the nature and type of livestock herds, should be stressed.
- c) In determining where Canada's ODA should focus, due regard should be paid to Canada's historical presence in recipient countries. But, we should also find other ways of engaging with countries such as China and India.
- d) Partnership should replace notions of donors and recipients in both words and deeds. In practical terms that means detailed and serious consultations with both governments and civil society in countries where we are proposing to allocate ODA.
- e) Youth internship programs should once again be a priority at CIDA. Such programs not only provide personnel to assist in developing countries or multilateral institutions, they also give young Canadians the opportunity to gain experience working and living overseas. Such experience is invaluable for those involved who often go on to work in government, development, business, or the military. Internships also enhance the future ability of Canada to protect and project our interests and values by increasing the pool of skilled young people willing and able to play a role in building a better world.

Above all else, major reforms are needed at the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), from the top down. The revolving-door approach to ministerial appointments has created an agency whose personnel are uncertain about the future and increasingly risk-averse. The relatively junior rank of the ministers does not indicate a government that is serious about ODA. And this is noticed in international fora, as well as with the Canadian public.

CIDA personnel are still largely Ottawa-based. Accountability chill has replaced innovation or creativity in their approaches. Other major donors, such as the UK Department for International Development (DFID) or the US Agency for International Development (USAID), are interested in new and innovative ideas; CIDA, in contrast, has developed more rules and regulations.

Careful attention should be paid to the Report of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade in February 2007, which focuses on Africa and which also sets out details for major reforms to Canada's ODA operations and organization.



## Make Nuclear Non-Proliferation a Priority

The speech by US President Barack Obama to the UN in September, his presence at the Security Council the next day, and the Security Council resolution on non-proliferation indicate a major shift in American thinking and action on non-proliferation. Canada has expertise, experience, and ideas on this subject. We should seize on these initiatives, and renew our efforts through the UN on non-proliferation by working with like-minded states to encourage and support the Americans as they take on this vital subject.

## Increase Canadian Attention to—and Action at—the United Nations

President Obama also spoke of American “re-engagement with the United Nations.” Canada should follow suit. There is an irony here—for many years Canadian foreign policy made the UN one of its pillars, partly as an antidote to the overwhelming importance of the United States in this country, and partly to counter what seemed like growing disenchantment in the United States with the UN. Nevertheless, it is crucial that multilateral responses to ongoing issues take precedence, and it is at and through the UN that those issues play out.

If Canada is elected to the Security Council, increased emphasis on multilateral approaches to major international issues will follow. Enhancing our ability to innovate as well as react to issues before the UN should be a priority. It is also important that we work to improve the functioning of the institution.

There are several areas which demand attention:

- a) *Peacekeeping*. While in some circles it has recently become popular to talk proudly about the Canadian military role in Afghanistan as “not peacekeeping,” the function remains an important one, albeit one which needs adaptation as the nature of keeping the peace changes from state-to-state conflict to internal violence within states or geographic areas. Robust peacekeeping is now a more realistic concept. Canada took part in almost all UN peacekeeping actions until the last decade. Now the UN has more troops in the field than ever, but Canadians are not amongst them. The Canadian military is skilled and professional and could add greatly to the expertise of UN peacekeeping undertakings. When the deployment of the Canadian military to Afghanistan comes to an end in 2011, serious consideration should be given to re-engagement with UN peacekeeping missions.
- b) *A rapid deployment force*. Canada undertook major work on this subject twenty years ago, and agreement could not then be reached. It is time to try again, using the Report of the Panel on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (commonly



known as the Brahimi Report), as well as the experience of the last ten years to bolster the case, as well as to provide examples of when and how its use might have averted ongoing problems.

- c) *The Security Council.* While the Council has been more effective in the past fifteen years, primarily because of changing power relationships in the world, its structure does not reflect the realities of the twenty-first century. Reform of the Council is an old chestnut that hasn't amounted to much in the past. Canada has been an effective non-permanent member, and thus has credibility with other members. If we are re-elected, we should give priority to making the Council better reflect current realities and power relationships. It is worth another effort if only to try to re-establish the primacy of the Council in the conduct of international affairs.

During the next five to ten years, it is important that Canada reinforce its credibility in international affairs. While reputation can take us a long way, it can soon dissipate if deeds do not follow speeches. Actions must accompany words. The Canadian reputation is good; it can be excellent.