

THE FAILURE TO PROTECT: HUMAN SECURITY AND CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY IN AFGHANISTAN

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Introduction

In a speech to the United Nations General Assembly in October 2007, then-Canadian Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier quoted Prime Minister Harper in saying that “the United Nations assistance mission in Afghanistan [is] the UN’s most important special political mission.”¹ The Government of Canada is reluctant to overstate the scale of Afghanistan’s importance to Canadian foreign policy, but even a reluctant government concedes that: “this mission is one of Canada’s most important commitments in many years.”² In truth, Afghanistan is the largest deployment of Canadian troops since the Korean War and the single most important Canadian foreign policy initiative of the past half-century.³ Certainly, it is the most ambitious example of ‘nation-building’ and a ‘whole of government’ approach to foreign policy which Canada has ever undertaken, and one of the most significant international projects of the post-Cold War era. It is also an undertaking that has now adopted as its primary rationale the betterment of life, and provision of human security, for the people of Afghanistan.

The complexity of pursuing human security objectives through military means is

¹ Maxime Bernier, *Notes for an address to the United Nations General Assembly* (New York, NY: October 2, 2007).

² Maxime Bernier, “Afghanistan: a realistic and responsible debate.” *Notes for an address to the International Conference on Canada’s Mission in Afghanistan* (Montreal, QC: September 19, 2007).

³ John Ferris, “Canada in Kandahar.” *Calgary Papers in Military and Strategic Studies*. Vol. 1 (Calgary, AB: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, 2007); David S. McDonough. “The Paradox of Afghanistan: Stability Operations and the Renewal of Canada’s International Security Policy?” *International Journal*. 62.3 (2007).

clearly evident upon an examination of the international effort in Afghanistan. The emancipation of Afghan civilians from the theocratic tyranny of the Taliban and the construction of a viable Afghan state are the avowed underpinnings of the UN-mandated NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The objectives of this international military presence are separate and distinct from the American military's ongoing Operation Enduring Freedom, a largely special forces-based operation whose explicit goal is the eradication of terrorist networks and the killing or capture of high value terrorist targets. The primacy of civilian protection within the international mission, however, is articulated in the opening line of *The Afghanistan Compact*, which states that: "Afghanistan and the international community [are] determined to strengthen their partnership to improve the lives of Afghan people."⁴ Within Canadian policy documents, human security is identified at the nexus of Canada's 'whole of government' approach towards Afghanistan and the three pillars of the Afghan Compact: security, governance, and development.

This paper will examine the *prima facie* case that Canadian policy and practice in Afghanistan have not been consistent with the stated valuation of human security and the protection of Afghan civilians. The failure to protect human security is twofold: first, international forces have inadequately addressed the threat posed to civilians by the Taliban insurgency and associated terrorist groups. Second, the tactics employed by international military forces have failed to adequately discriminate between civilians and combatants and have directly resulted in increasing numbers of civilian casualties. These failings indicate that Canada's practices in Afghanistan do not to cohere with its own policies regarding the protection of human security, violate the emergent

⁴ The London Conference on Afghanistan, *Afghanistan Compact*. (31 January – 1 February, 2006).

international doctrine of human security, and seriously question the validity of official claims that Canada and the international community are protecting the human security of civilians in Afghanistan. Moreover, it is argued that the effective application of the principles of human security to the conduct of counterinsurgency (COIN) by international military forces would greatly improve the likelihood of success in the long-term Afghan state-building project.

Human Security in Concept

Before any examination of human security in Afghanistan is possible, it is first necessary to define the concept and outline the dramatic shift that has taken place in the discourse surrounding the very notion of 'security'. Whereas during the Cold War nuclear realities ensured that states took primacy in any examination of security, the collapse of the Soviet Union allowed a slackening of the conceptual bonds that had restricted the study of security over the previous forty years. Not only were non-military threats to the security of states explored for the first time as legitimate sources of insecurity, the place of the state itself as the sole referent of security studies became increasingly challenged. Societies, human collectivities, and individuals, hitherto taken for granted as having their security synonymous with and contingent upon the security of their respective states, emerged as autonomous referent objects within security discourse. These two processes, the 'widening' of the security field to include non-military threats and its 'deepening' to examine threats to units of analysis other than the state, arose at a time when even traditional security scholars

accepted the need to look more widely at non-military causes of conflict in the international system and made little explicit attempt to

defend the centrality of the state in security analysis when so many nonstate actors were playing vigorously in the military game.⁵

Even today, when the place of non-military threats and non-state actors within the field of security studies has been broadly accepted, there is widespread disagreement over which threats are appropriate to study, which actors are legitimate referents, and even the nature of 'security' and 'insecurity' within a changed global environment and discordant academic discourse.⁶

Human security embodies and exacerbates all of these disagreements. To some it is clear that individuals are the ultimate security referent and that threats can originate from any number of sources; to others, it exemplifies the conceptual dangers of securitizing too many threats towards too specific a unit of analysis, resulting in "human security [seemingly] capable of supporting virtually any hypothesis – along with its opposite – depending on the prejudices and interests of the researcher."⁷ The resulting split within human security has led to the development of two distinct conceptual schools. Human security has been embraced by a 'broad' school of security which holds that "'security' means the absence of threats,"⁸ and that as the freedom of people from physical human constraints upon their activities, "emancipation produces true security. Emancipation, theoretically, is security."⁹ This interpretation suggests that human security can only be achieved through a sweeping process of alleviating the many different sources of oppression and constraint existent within a given society. It

⁵ Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), p. 3.

⁶ For examples see Vol. 35.3. *Security Dialogue* devoted to the debate surrounding human security.

⁷ Roland Paris, "Human Security – Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?" *International Security*. 26.2. (2001), p. 93.

⁸ Ken Booth, "Security and Emancipation." *Review of International Studies*. Vol. 17 (1991), p. 319.

⁹ *Ibid.*

encompasses the broad array of threats to individuals contained within the military, political, economic, societal, and environmental spheres, a panoply of insecurity which includes: murder, physical injury, mental health, homelessness, bankruptcy, access to essential services, and ecological degradation.

This broad school of human security also operates within a framework that accepts that while the state is often the most effective instrument for safeguarding human security, it is also a frequent culprit in the violation of that same security. The understanding that “the security of individuals is locked into an unbreakable paradox in which it is partly dependent on, and partly threatened by the state”¹⁰ has important implications for the implementation of security policy, since the instruments of the state can hardly be relied upon to safeguard the security of individuals if they are complicit in the threat posed to that security. The broad interpretation of human security poses clear challenges to the conceptualization of security and the actualization of policies designed to protect that security.

The value of the individual as a referent object for analysis has also been embraced within more ‘narrow’ interpretations of security concerned with violence as constituting the major threat to human security. As the conceptual descendent of the strategic studies discourse of the Cold War era, this school of thought has widened the traditional strategic focus from state-based threats to the existence of other states to include precipitous and existential threats of violence to individuals and human collectivities. Three factors are the central elements of a narrow interpretation of human security, and constitute the defining characteristics of the definition of human security

¹⁰ Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991), p. 364.

that will be employed in this paper. *Violence* is an essential component because it contributes intellectual coherence to our conception of security. Without defining violence as the means by which security is threatened, any and all dangers to individuals from any conceivable source, as outlined above, constitutes a security threat.

The threat of violence must, however, be *existential* to the individual or collectivity involved, lest any and all violence, no matter how minor, be construed as a threat to security. At its root, “security is about survival. It is when an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object”¹¹ that a threat to that object’s security can be said to exist. The threat need not necessarily result in death, but must credibly threaten life. This line of reasoning is evident within the domestic sphere in the context of judicial systems which regard acts of self-defence in the preservation of one’s existence as being reasonable grounds for the use of exceptional force, all in the interest of protecting one’s own security. Lastly, the threat must be *precipitous*, or sudden and abrupt, otherwise the very act of being born could be construed as a security threat since it will inevitably result in death. Temporal considerations also contribute to conceptual coherence by narrowing the scope of security threats and removing from discussions of security factors such as long-term health, access to medical care, and similar social phenomena. These factors might ultimately threaten human life, but they cannot reasonably be considered as threats to human security without exposing the discourse to a deluge of socio-economic ills that

¹¹ Buzan, et al., p. 21

effectively strip the idea of 'security' of any analytic value, rendering it "a loose synonym for 'bad things that can happen'."¹²

For the purposes of this paper, human security is defined as the condition of individuals being free from violent threats to their lives and physical well-being. Such violence must involve the use or threat of coercive force, rather than be embedded within social institutions in the manner of structural violence.¹³ This is because structural violence, defined as "avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs,"¹⁴ coheres with the broader school of human security that unavoidably widens the scope of threats to security to include the entire gamut of potential human ills, as described above. The restricted definition of security threats as predicated upon violence enables an examination of military and political factors in Afghanistan that are most responsible for threatening Afghan human security. While the provision of essential services is of obvious importance to Afghanistan's long-term viability, and the vulnerability of Afghans to threats in the societal, economic, and environmental sectors is certainly prevalent, the establishment of "security is an essential condition of good governance and lasting development."¹⁵ A socio-political environment free from threats of physical violence is a requirement for the resolution of security threats in all others sectors.

Such a definition is also the most appropriate to this paper, given that it examines Canadian foreign and military policy and action in Afghanistan and their implications for human security. It is appropriate to measure the efficacy of Canadian policy towards

¹² Keith Krause, "The Key to a Powerful Agenda, if Properly Delimited." *Security Dialogue*. 35.3. (2004), p. 367.

¹³ For details on structural violence see: Johan Galtung. "Violence, peace, and peace research." *Journal of Peace Research*. 6.3.

¹⁴ Johan Galtung, "Kulturelle Gewalt." *Der Burger in Staat*. Vol. 43. (1993), p.106.

¹⁵ Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan, *Report of the Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan*. (2008), p. 11.

human security against the metrics that the Canadian government has established for itself. In *Freedom from Fear: Canada's Foreign Policy for Human Security*, the concept is defined as "freedom from pervasive threats to people's rights, safety, or lives,"¹⁶ and in more recent official documents, the definition is slightly altered to read "freedom from violent threats to people's rights, safety, or lives."¹⁷ Indeed, Canada was central to the propagation of the 'narrow' stream of human security, which has since come to be understood as a specifically 'Canadian' approach to human security.¹⁸ In terms of policy, therefore, it is clear that the Canadian government employs a narrow interpretation of human security, and this should be used to guide any analysis of Canadian policy in the field.

Human Security in Application

It is important to emphasize that human security is more than a conceptual abstraction, but rather a well established principle within contemporary international politics. The 1990s and early years of the 21st century saw extraordinary progress in the application of human considerations to the policies surrounding security in both the domestic and international spheres. The first time which human security was enunciated within a policy document was in the opening line of the 1994 UN Human Development Report, which categorically stated that: "the world can never be at peace unless people have security in their daily lives."¹⁹ The report laid the foundation for the

¹⁶ DFAIT, *Freedom from Fear: Canada's Foreign Policy for Human Security*. (Ottawa, ON: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 2002), p. 3.

¹⁷ DFAIT, "Human Security > Cities: Freedom From Fear in Urban Spaces." Leaflet. (Ottawa, ON: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 2006).

¹⁸ Jasmin H. Cheung-Gertler, "A model power for a troubled world?" *International Journal*. 62.3. (2007)

¹⁹ UNDP. *Human Development Report: New Dimensions of Human Security*. (New York, NY: United Nations, 1994).

elevation of human security to a major component within the formulation of the international security agenda, including the development of Canada's *Freedom from Fear*, and culminating in the 2003 report of the UN Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now*.

Perhaps the most important incorporation of human security into international policy, however, was the adoption at the 2005 UN World Summit of the 'responsibility to protect'. This responsibility – of all states to protect individuals from war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity – is the result of the eponymous final report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS). The mandate of the ICISS was to investigate “when, if ever, it is appropriate for states to take coercive – and in particular military – action, against another state for the purpose of protecting people at risk in that other state.”²⁰ Its conclusion: in situations whenever the human security of a population is unacceptably threatened by the actions or omissions of their government, particularly in times of violent crisis or war as indicated above. Human security has become a legitimate *casus belli* for the international community to take military action against a state, a fact that marks a considerable erosion of the once-hallowed principle of state sovereignty. Put another way, human security, narrowly defined, has been determined by the international community and *accepted* by states as a principle of equal or greater value to sovereignty itself.

Considering the degree to which human security has become a foundational principle of contemporary international relations, especially following the promulgation of the responsibility to protect, it is appropriate to speak no longer of a human security

²⁰ ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty*. (Ottawa, ON: International Development Research Centre, 2001), p. vii.

principle, but a human security doctrine. While there is no question that protecting human security is an ideal which the international community has failed to live up to, nevertheless "it is currently considered an overarching concept and functional framework for peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding, and despite the fact that it is contested, it projects a paradigmatic shift."²¹ The concept has been internalized by the policies, if not yet practices, of states to such a degree that it has taken on the shape of a doctrine capable of governing the future direction of state action. Moreover, human security is indivisibly melded to other concepts central to the prosecution of international politics. As identified by Lloyd Axworthy, the most renowned Canadian proponent of the concept, human security policy is:

an effort to construct a global society where the safety of the individual is at the centre of international priorities and a motivating force for international action; where international human standards and the rule of law are advanced and woven into a coherent web protecting the individual; where those who violate these standards are held fully accountable; and where our global, regional and bilateral institutions – present and future – are built and equipped to enhance and enforce these standards.²²

In this respect, the human security doctrine is a composite formed from the foundational elements of a human-centric security framework, human rights, and international humanitarian law. For the purposes of this paper, the human security doctrine will be referred to with reference to these foundational elements and the legal and moral onus on states to take action, or limit their actions, with respect to human security.

²¹ Miltiadis Sarigiannidis, "Legal discourses on peacemaking/peacekeeping/ peacebuilding." *International Journal*. 62.3 (2007), p. 523.

²² Lloyd Axworthy, "Introduction." *Human Security and the New Diplomacy: Protecting People, Promoting Peace*. Rob McRae and Don Hubert (Eds). (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), p. 12.

It is this composite nature of the human security doctrine that also contributes to its prominence within certain policy circles. Even if the specific phrase 'human security doctrine' is not necessarily used, many documents will refer to all or a combination of its three composite elements of human-centric security, human rights, and international humanitarian law. This is particularly the case with respect to military operations, part of the operationalization of the fact that "the military operation no longer stands on its own, but forms part of a comprehensive humanitarian operation."²³ This is clearly demonstrated within the Canadian government, in particular the 3-D or 'whole of government' approach that nominally governs the formulation and implementation of Canada's Afghan policy. In its Report to Parliament, the Government acknowledged that "good governance, rule of law, and respect for human rights are inextricably linked to the deepening and broadening of security for the Afghan people and to the economic development of their society."²⁴ Given that the Government in question is a Conservative one, the use of human security language and reference to the constituent elements of the human security doctrine in terms of macro-objectives in Afghanistan strongly suggests the non-partisan nature of the ideational underpinnings of human security in the Canadian context.

Canada and Afghanistan

Canada's current involvement in Afghanistan began for reasons which had nothing to do with human security. In the aftermath of the attacks in New York City and

²³ Geliijn Molier, "Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect After 9/11." *Netherlands International Law Review*. LIII. (2006), p. 41.

²⁴ Government of Canada, "Canada's Mission in Afghanistan: Measuring Progress." *Report to Parliament*. (February 2007), p. 12.

Washington D.C. on September 11, 2001, NATO invoked the collective defence provision laid out in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. This constitutes the only time in the history of NATO that collective self-defence has ever been invoked, and it was within the context of a unified response to an attack upon its closest ally that Canada agreed to participate in the invasion of Afghanistan. Accordingly, in October 2001 Canadian naval vessels participated in joint operations with the United States and United Kingdom in the Arabian Sea, and beginning in December 2001 Canadian ground troops and special forces participated in offensive campaigns against the Taliban in the border regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

There was no talk of human security at the time as it was clear that “the prime reason for the U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan was to destroy the terrorist network responsible for the September 11 attack and topple the Taliban regime.”²⁵ Canada and the other NATO members were participating in one of the rare instances of overt, interstate, military force employed in direct self-defence since the end of the Cold War. It was neither a collective security action like the first Gulf War, a humanitarian intervention as was the case in Somalia and Kosovo, nor a peacekeeping mission as in Cambodia or Bosnia. The conflict in Afghanistan began as an exercise in retributive justice, a clear-cut self-interested response to an act of state-supported terrorism. However, during the winter of 2001/2002 the nature of international involvement in Afghanistan underwent a substantial shift as the scale of the impending humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan as a result of the US-led military campaign became clear.

²⁵ Ali A. Jalali, “The Legacy of War and the Challenge of Peace Building.” *Building a New Afghanistan*. Robert I. Rotberg (Ed). (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2007), p. 23.

Following accession to the Bonn Agreement in December 2001, the international community turned its attention towards the dual processes of providing basic services for Afghans and building independent governance structures for the Afghan state.²⁶ Although the American-led Operation Enduring Freedom continued its mission of eliminating Taliban and terrorist forces in the south and east of the country, “policymakers soon began offering a humanitarian rationale for their actions, as well as those of self-defence, military necessity, and the demands of the ‘war’ on terrorism.”²⁷ Overwhelming American military force had succeeded in toppling the regime, but in the process had shattered what Afghan political structures had existed, and the ensuing hazards of famine and anarchy threatened to overwhelm the legitimacy of the American military action in that country. As a result, the ongoing hard security objectives of the United States became complemented by multi-track processes of development and nation-building.

The shift towards multilateral, media-friendly policies such as development was indicative of a growing realization that it would not be possible to ‘sell’ the military action in Afghanistan to a war-resistant public on the basis of hard security objectives alone. This was clear “within days of the onslaught of the bombing campaign, [as] people all over the world began to grow indignant over the deaths of innocent Afghans from the American bombing – Afghans who were as much victims of bin Laden and the Taliban as were the dead of the World Trade Centre.”²⁸ For Canadians, the reality of the nature of their Forces’ role in Afghanistan was driven home in 2004 and 2005, as Canadian

²⁶ Bonn Agreement, *Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions*. UN document S/2001/1154. (December 5, 2001).

²⁷ David Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*. (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2002), p. 232.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

troops engaged in greater amounts of combat activity and transferred from Kabul to insurgency-ridden Kandahar in the south. Suddenly, “headlines began detailing drastic increases in suicide attacks, improvised explosive device detonations, and brazen daylight guerrilla attacks against [Canadian] troops, [and] Canadians suddenly woke up and began asking, ‘When the hell did we agree to go to war?’”²⁹

Political expedience coupled with the onset of the ‘CNN effect’ necessitated a recasting of the conflict in alternative terms, employing language and principles palatable to the public and compatible with post-9/11 strategic objectives. In place of national security or the elimination of terrorism that had been the *raison d’être* of the initial Canadian military participation, ‘nation-building’ in the context of freeing the Afghan people from the Taliban became the explicit objective of both Canadian and NATO policy. The shift in the language surrounding international policy towards Afghanistan, an “*ex post facto* morphing of the justification for [war],”³⁰ has often been stark. The new emphasis in policy language was further encouraged after 2003 as NATO leaders sought to distinguish an Afghan mission increasingly conflated in the public mind with the American imbroglio in Iraq.

The change can be seen by the way in which involvement in Afghanistan has been discussed and legitimized within the Canadian government. In a speech entitled “Why Afghanistan? Why Canada?” given in September 2003, then Minister of National Defence John McCallum opened his remarks with reference to “Canada’s contribution to the campaign against terrorism, particularly our recent deployment to Afghanistan,” and went on to state that “Canada is one of the countries on Osama Bin Laden’s ‘hit list’

²⁹ Scott Taylor, “Canada’s Mission in Afghanistan: Beyond the Rhetoric.” *Calgary Papers in Military and Strategic Studies*. Vol. 1 (Calgary, AB: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, 2007), p. 12.

³⁰ Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Intervention: Ideas in Action*. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007), p. 119.

. . . the mission in Afghanistan is fundamental to Canada's security."³¹ Language such as this overt reference to Canada's participation in the putative 'war on terror', and any reference to Osama bin Laden, has been largely erased from recent policy documents or official discussion surrounding the mission.

While the concept of fighting in Afghanistan to protect the safety of Canadians remains a large part of official discourse, it has been wedded to the notion of constructive humanitarian engagement designed to provide Afghans with a secure environment conducive to an improvement in their quality of life. This message is made clear in subsequent documents such as the 2007 *Interim Report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence*, in which the opening line of the section describing Canada's rationale for involving itself in Afghanistan reads: "Canada is deeply involved in attempting to stabilize Afghanistan, for very good reasons. Firstly, looking at Canada's involvement in Afghanistan from a humanitarian point of view, only a very callous person would deny that the Afghan people need help."³² As another example, in the *Overview of Canada's Contribution to the International Mission in Afghanistan*, the second sentence begins: "Alongside the UN, NATO, and our other partners, Canada has committed to help the people of Afghanistan realize their vision for a country that is secure and at peace."³³ The shift is marked, from the language of combating terrorism to that of protecting civilian life.

³¹ John McCallum, "Why Afghanistan? Why Canada?" *Speaking notes for the Calgary Chamber of Commerce*. (Calgary, AB: September 12, 2003).

³² Senate of Canada, "Taking a Hard Look at a Hard Mission." *Interim Report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence*. (Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada, February 2007), p. 2.

³³ DFAIT, *Overview of Canada's Contribution to the International Mission in Afghanistan*. (Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada, 2007), p. 1.

The Failure to Protect

The Insurgency

Despite the rhetoric, Canada's failure to apply the human security doctrine in Afghanistan is twofold. First, international forces, of which Canada is an important part, have failed to adequately protect Afghan civilians from the threat posed to them by the Taliban-led insurgency. This is manifest in the fact that the security situation across Afghanistan is the worst it has been at any point since 2001, to the point that "arguably, most Afghans were less secure in 2006 than they were under Taliban rule."³⁴ Worse still, the rates of violence in Afghanistan have only increased, with the average number of insurgent-caused violent incidents involving civilians rising from 425 incidents per month in 2006 to 548 per month in 2007.³⁵ As identified by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his report on Afghanistan, this steady decrease in the security of Afghans is a result of "an intensifying Taliban-led insurgency that increasingly relies on suicide bombing and other terrorist tactics."³⁶ The insurgency has resulted in greater civilian casualties as a result of increasingly deadly tactics both collaterally and deliberately targeting civilians. Not only are the "Taliban relying more on direct attacks against civilian targets and improvised explosive devices, but they are also increasingly using civilians as human shields."³⁷ And whereas only the southern provinces of Kandahar, Helmand, Uruzgan, and Zabul were primarily affected by the insurgency when it began, the violence "is also spreading geographically to the west and north and

³⁴ Robert I. Rotberg, "Renewing the Afghan State." *Building a New Afghanistan*. Robert I. Rotberg (Ed). (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2007), p. 3.

³⁵ Ban Ki-Moon, "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security." *Report of the Secretary-General*. UN document A/62/345-S/2007/555 (2007), p. 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁷ Christina Caan and Scott Worden, "Rebuilding Civil Society in Afghanistan: Fragile Progress and Formidable Obstacles." *USIPeace Briefing*. (United States Institute of Peace. Accessed at www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace_briefings. October 5, 2007), p. 2.

getting closer to Kabul,” to the point that “almost half of Afghanistan is now affected by fighting involving the Taliban, government forces, and NATO’s International Security Assistance Force.”³⁸

There is little dispute that the security environment in Afghanistan has deteriorated drastically since 2005. Violence increased by 30% from 2006 to 2007, efforts have been slow to establish sufficient security capacity to effectively combat the insurgency, and there is increasing empirical evidence to demonstrate this. A study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies measured security in Afghanistan between 2005 and 2007 along a two dimensional grid in terms of both short-term effectiveness and the development of long-term capacity. It illustrated that both measures of security had decreased since 2005, with short-term effectiveness and long-term sustainability both dropping into the quadrant of the diagram labelled the ‘danger zone’ or ‘High Risk Sector’.³⁹ To demonstrate this, a three-day period from February 17-19 2008 saw approximately 150 civilians killed in three separate bombing incidents in the Canadian-controlled province of Kandahar.⁴⁰ One blast alone killed over 100, making it the single worst insurgent attack upon civilians since the fall of the Taliban in 2001.

Exacerbating the impact of the increasing severe and widespread insurgency are insufficient numbers of international troops to effectively capture, retain, and police the entire country. As of early 2008, international troops in Afghanistan numbered roughly

³⁸ in Senlis Council, “Peace in Afghanistan – Made in Canada.” *A Companion Report to Peace Talks Simulation Game Afghanistan: A Way Out of War?* (Accessed at http://www.senliscouncil.net/modules/publications/026_publication: October 10 2007), p. 17.

³⁹ CSIS, *Breaking Point: Measuring Progress in Afghanistan*. A report of the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project. (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007.

⁴⁰ CBC News, “Afghan blast kills dozens.” (Accessed at <http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2008/02/17/afghanistan.html>, February 17 2008).

41,000 soldiers under ISAF command, with an additional 15,000 soldiers remaining under the aegis of the American-led Operation Enduring Freedom. By contrast, NATO deployed a force of approximately 60,000 to Bosnia, a country one-thirteenth the size and one sixth the population of Afghanistan, following the resolution of that country's civil war. The current number of soldiers deployed to Afghanistan – identified as one of several 'harmful shortcomings' by the Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan – has clearly proven insufficient to effectively combat the Taliban, provide security, and allow reconstruction to take place, commonly referred to as ISAF's 'take, hold, build' strategy. Indeed, "clearly there has been a disconnect between the realities on the ground in Afghanistan and NATO's deployment."⁴¹ The continuing failure of NATO members to provide adequate numbers of troops simultaneously diminishes the security of Afghan civilians and increases the challenge to itself of effectively pacifying the country.

Over the winter of 2001/2002 the Taliban were scattered and weakened, and combat operations were more traditional in nature. By contrast, today "the war in Afghanistan is a counterinsurgency war which has become unnecessarily protracted because of the insufficient commitments of some NATO countries."⁴² This has increased the threat of violence and death to Afghans by dramatically extending the length of time during which they have been forced to endure the trauma of war and conflict. Thus, while "security at the personal level is critical and among the fundamental determinants of nation-state effectiveness, so far personal security

⁴¹ Joshua Walker, "NATO's Litmus Test: Prioritizing Afghanistan." *Calgary Papers in Military and Strategic Studies*. Vol. 1. (Calgary, AB: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, 2007), p. 73.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 13.

throughout the [Afghan] proto-nation remains a rhetorical aspiration.”⁴³ NATO members collectively bear responsibility for the protraction of the Afghan conflict and the resultant decrease in human security, but as a NATO member, an active combatant in Afghanistan, and a state that has been a key advocate of human security, the failure to protect Afghan civilians is Canada’s as well and, perhaps, in particular.

A significant result of the insufficient number of international troops has been an over-reliance upon Afghan military and security structures that are insufficiently developed to adequately perform their responsibilities. Not only do the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP) have questionable and competing allegiances between the elected government in Kabul and regional and tribal elements, they are also categorically unprepared to take on the roles that the international community is increasingly eager for them to play. While there have been positive strides made by the ANA, “the strain of continual commitment to the intense pace of operations continues to contribute to desertions.”⁴⁴ In fact, although the Afghan government boasts of the recruitment and training of over 40,000 soldiers, “after taking into account desertion, ghost names, and the incompetence of many, the total is likely to be half that number.”⁴⁵ The ANA remains under-equipped and cannot operate without substantial support from international forces, and it has been observed that recruitment and training rates provide poor indicators of success in the security sector. In fact, “the least important metric is how many people in each service have been trained and equipped . . . [since] success consists of having actual forces active in the

⁴³ Rotberg, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Ban, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁵ CSIS, p. 34.

field.”⁴⁶ What matters more than the number of soldiers trained is the number that appears when called to duty and stand their ground when challenged. By this measure, the prospects of the ANA undertaking independent responsibility for security in Afghanistan remain highly unlikely.

The situation within the ANP, meanwhile, is universally recognized to be substantially worse than within the ANA. Core requirements for an effective security force such as “respect for authority and elementary discipline have not yet been instilled, and the actions of the police within communities often inspire more fear than confidence in the people.”⁴⁷ Although over 50,000 police officers have been recruited, they have received only limited training, and remain highly unreliable in their operational capabilities and loyalty to the central government in Kabul. Even where the ANP is functional, it “has insufficient presence in rural districts, and those that are patrolling are perceived to be corrupt, abusive, and lacking discipline.”⁴⁸ As often an agent of insecurity as effective protection for the population, the ANP is in all categories failing to meet the expectations of the international community, and is categorically unable to satisfy the need for effective policing and maintenance of order in the countryside. This is particularly the case given the ways in which attacks are increasingly being carried out, such as through suicide bombings, methods which “are traditionally alien to the Afghans . . . With more than seventy suicide attacks in 2006 . . . the resurgent Taliban have become more radical, more brutal, and more sophisticated than when US-led

⁴⁶ Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Uncertain 'Metrics' of Afghanistan (and Iraq)*. (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007), p. 6.

⁴⁷ Rotberg, p. 3.

⁴⁸ CSIS, p. 36.

forces ousted them,”⁴⁹ and are certainly beyond the capacity of the Afghan domestic security architecture to effectively pacify.

Despite the desire of NATO to move towards greater ‘Afghanization’ of the security sector, the drive towards such a policy is simply not commensurate with the reality on the ground. The security environment has deteriorated, due to a shortage of international military forces following the overthrow of the Taliban, to one in which domestic Afghan security forces are simply incapable of effectively addressing the size and severity of the present insurgency. Given the severe limitations of manpower, autonomy, and reliability of the ANA and ANP, “there is no chance that the training of the Afghan army and police will produce a military force able to defend itself against a resurgent Taliban and a conglomerate of jihadist terrorists.”⁵⁰ While the goal of fostering independent Afghan security institutions is essential to the long-term viability of the Afghan state, it is clearly unattainable within the rapid timeframe being pursued by NATO. This assessment was confirmed in October 2007 by Canadian Chief of the Defence Staff Gen. Rick Hillier, who stated that “it’s going to take ten years or so just to work through and build an army . . . and make them more professional and let them meet their security demands.”⁵¹ Between now and the eventual establishment of an effective Afghan security architecture, there will continue to exist a gap in security capacity so long as international troops remain so limited in number. This gap, in turn, will continue to be directly responsible for an increased level of human *in*security for the general Afghan populace.

⁴⁹ Jalali, p. 41.

⁵⁰ Walker, p. 71.

⁵¹ CBC News, “Afghans years away from taking over own security: Hillier.” (Accessed at <http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2007/10/25/hillier-afghan-mission.html>, October 25, 2007).

Coalition-Caused Casualties

The second way in which Canada has failed to live up to its obligations under the human security doctrine is as a contributor to the increasing number of civilian casualties occurring as a direct result of NATO military action. The past year has seen a growing furor over the number of civilians killed by international forces, a number which in 2006 “surpassed the death toll of the September 11 attacks. Nearly 3,800 Afghan civilians have died since the conflict began”⁵² at the hands of international military forces. These casualties are mainly the result of direct fire incidents, artillery shelling, and aerial bombing, with aerial bombing being of particular concern because it often results in the greatest number of casualties for the least strategic gain. In addition to the deleterious impact upon public perception regarding ISAF operations, these civilian deaths fundamentally undermine the long-term objectives of the international mission in Afghanistan by acting as a multiplier upon the number of recruits available to the insurgents.

This ambivalence towards civilian life has squandered one of the greatest advantages enjoyed by the international forces since the 2001-2002 invasion, the fact that a majority of Afghans accepted their presence and expressed optimism that NATO would bring improvement to the quality of their lives.⁵³ However, while the security considerations of the international community demand the effective use of force against the Taliban and other terrorist elements, “increased incidents involving civilian casualties, primarily in bombing raids, have predictably proven to be detrimental to

⁵² Hekmat Karzai, “Strengthening Security in Contemporary Afghanistan: Coping with the Taliban.” *Building a New Afghanistan*. Robert I. Rotberg (Ed). (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2007), p. 72.

⁵³ CSIS, p. 4.

winning the support and trust of the Afghan people.”⁵⁴ The principles of force protection which have thus far inclined NATO to rely heavily upon aerial bombing as a means of reducing the risk to its own soldiers have taken a substantial toll upon the security of Afghan civilians caught in the midst of conflict. These highly questionable aspects of NATO strategy “have resulted in the death or injury of large numbers of non-combatants, and the frequency of such incidents continues to rise,”⁵⁵ with more than 400 civilians killed between January 1 and August 31, 2007.

Examples of coalition-caused casualties abound. During a ten-day period in the middle of June 2007, over 90 civilians were killed by air strikes and artillery fire targeting insurgent positions.⁵⁶ An incident in October 2006 resulted in as many as 80 civilians reported by Afghan authorities to have been killed by ISAF artillery and aerial bombing.⁵⁷ Estimates place the total number of civilians killed by international forces in the first half of 2007 at 360, surpassing the number killed by insurgents during the same period, a circumstance leading Afghan President Hamid Karzai to decry what he described as “careless operations” by international forces.⁵⁸ Canadian troops have been directly responsible for the shooting deaths of civilians on numerous occasions, including January 30, 2008; October 2, February 27, February 18 and February 17, 2007; and December 12, October 18, August 22 and March 14, 2006.⁵⁹ While some of

⁵⁴ Senlis Council, p. 14.

⁵⁵ Ban, p. 13.

⁵⁶ CBC News, “More forces killed by foreign forces than by insurgents in 2007: report.” (Accessed at <http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2007/06/24/afghanistan.html>, June 24, 2007).

⁵⁷ CBC News, “At least 60 civilians killed in NATO operation: Afghan officials.” (Accessed at <http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2006/10/26/civilian-deaths.html>, October 26, 2006).

⁵⁸ Washington Post, “Karzai Decries Civilian Deaths.” (Accessed at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/23/AR2007062300355.html>, June 24, 2007).

⁵⁹ CBC News, “Canadian soldiers fatally shoot taxi driver.” (Accessed at http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2006/03/15/afghanistan_taxi060315.html, March 15, 2006); CTV.ca News. “Afghan accidentally killed by Canadian troops.” (Accessed at <http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20061213/afghan>

these incidents result from the use of civilians as human shields by the Taliban, ultimate responsibility still lies with the international forces demonstrating their frequent inability to do nothing if the occasion demands. As put by former Italian Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema, the scale of coalition-caused civilian casualties in Afghanistan is "not acceptable on a moral level . . . [and] disastrous on a political level."⁶⁰

The high levels of civilian casualties are not only a direct indication of human insecurity in Afghanistan, but also act as an unsettling predictor of further violence to come. Perhaps the greatest impact of NATO-caused civilian casualties is as a multiplier upon the number of recruits available to the very insurgency which it is involved in fighting. Putting aside that "the foot soldiers of the insurgency are Afghans recruited from within Afghanistan . . . [and] are not ideologically driven,"⁶¹ and whose deaths are detrimental to the international cause in and of themselves, the deaths of non-combatants poses a serious concern in a tribal society with a well established ethos of honour and revenge. In such an environment, "if one innocent civilian is killed it diminishes the goodwill of a whole family, a community, and a tribe,"⁶² and further alienates the very people upon whom NATO's ultimate success depends. The death of

[_civilian_061213/](#), December 13, 2006); CBC News. "Canadian troops kill unarmed Afghan civilian." (Accessed at <http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2007/02/17/afghan-shooting.html>, February 17, 2007); CTV.ca News. "Canadian troops kill Afghan civilian, officer." (Accessed at http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20070219/kandahar_ambush_070219/20070219?hub=World, February 19, 2007); CBC News. "Canadian troops kill another Afghan civilian." (Accessed at <http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2007/02/27/accidental-shooting-070227.html>, February 27, 2007); The Globe and Mail. "Canadians kill Afghan civilian, wound child." (Accessed at http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/Page/document/v5/content/subscribe?user_URL=http://www.theglobeandmail.com%2Fservlet%2Fstory%2FRTGAM.20071002.wafghshot1002%2FBNStory%2FFront&ord=2754710&brand=theglobeandmail&force_login=true, October 2, 2007); Le Devoir. "Enqu#te sur une fusillade entre soldats canadiens et civils afgans." (Accessed at <http://www.ledevoir.com/2008/02/11/175676.html>, February 11, 2008).

⁶⁰ BBC News, "NATO mulls 'smaller Afghan bombs'." (Accessed at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6921713.stm, July 30 2007).

⁶¹ Kofi Annan, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Afghanistan and its Implications for Peace and Security." UN document. <http://www.daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/492/46/PDF/N0649246.pdf?OpenElement>. (September 11, 2006).

⁶² Karzai, p. 78.

a single civilian will likely drive others to join the insurgent cause, and these new recruits to the insurgency will directly contribute to further attacks upon both civilian and military targets, prompting NATO to respond and ultimately contributing to the cyclical nature of violent exchange. As such, "in this context killing the civilian is no longer just collateral damage. The harm cannot be easily dismissed as unintended. Civilian casualties tangibly undermine the counterinsurgent's goals."⁶³

Although civilian deaths are incredibly detrimental to the prospects of NATO success, members of the coalition have yet to adequately adjust their tactics to provide greater protection to civilians. Instead "NATO and the United States' 'big army' military operations and emphasis on [Taliban] foot soldier 'kills' are doing more damage than good. The ensuing collateral damage in a culture that emphasizes revenge has created '10 enemies out of one.'"⁶⁴ Even allowing for a degree of hyperbole, the prospect of every civilian casualty acting as a multiplier of three, or four, or five, upon the number of recruits replenishing the insurgency clearly suggests that the disregard for human security exhibited by the present allied strategy in Afghanistan is fomenting a conflict which NATO cannot win.

Coalition-caused casualties also result in higher levels of popular support for the Taliban-led insurgency, the very entity that those civilian deaths are collaterally claimed in defeating. In this way, the tactical use of airpower and artillery can be seen to be extremely dilatory to the long-term success of NATO strategy in Afghanistan. Nowhere is this negative impact of tactic upon strategy more evident than in the near doubling in the period between November 2006 and May 2007 of the number of Afghans favouring

⁶³ Sarah Sewell, "Introduction to the University of Chicago Press Edition: A Radical Field Manual." *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), p. xxv.

⁶⁴ CSIS, p. 69.

a return to power by the Taliban. That number rose from 8% to 15% in a six-month period,⁶⁵ a trend which is clearly of tremendous significance to the long-term prospects for Afghan stability. In prosecuting an enemy-centric war against the Taliban, ISAF has forgotten that, unlike other types of conflict, in counter-insurgency “the civilian population is the center of gravity – the deciding factor in the struggle . . . The real battle is for civilian support for, or acquiescence to, the counterinsurgents and host nation government.”⁶⁶ So long as enemies, rather than civilians, remain the focus of ISAF operations, civilian casualties incurred during tactical success will continue to confound strategic victory.

The Afghanistan Dilemma

One of the seminal documents of the human security doctrine, the ICISS’s *Responsibility to Protect*, stipulates a set of ‘precautionary principles’ which must be met before an intervention may be launched to stem mass violence or alleviate gross instances of human suffering. One of these principles is ‘reasonable prospects’, which demands that there “be a reasonable chance of success in halting or averting the suffering which has justified the intervention, with the consequences of action not likely to be worse than the consequences of inaction.”⁶⁷ While the intervention in Afghanistan was not undertaken as a humanitarian intervention, the rhetoric of humanitarianism and human security has since come to be used as primary justification for it. Under these circumstances, it seems appropriate to judge the legitimacy of the mission in

⁶⁵ Greg Bruno, “Daily Analysis: Afghan Soul Searching.” Accessed at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/14601> on October 25, 2007; Council on Foreign Relations, October 23 2007.

⁶⁶ Sewell, p. xxv.

⁶⁷ ICISS, p. vii.

Afghanistan against the same standard that the international community would judge any humanitarian intervention. As such, the current mission would clearly fail to live up to the 'reasonable prospect' principle since the commitment of the international community is insufficient to provide the endeavour with the greatest possible likelihood of success.

There can be no question that NATO and its member states are failing in their objectives if after six years of combat operations "Afghans are more insecure . . . because of the violence surrounding the growing insurgency and international military operations."⁶⁸ Similarly, *Responsibility to Protect* states unequivocally that "force protection cannot become the principal objective"⁶⁹ of an intervention, and that every military operation must retain an understanding that friendly casualties may result but the objective of the operation outweighs the corresponding loss of life. If the cost is considered too high, then a state must question whether it is able to act in the interests of human security to begin with.

It has become clear that the rhetorical rush towards development and 'post-conflict' reconstruction in Afghanistan was premature, and, moreover, that it has created a serious problem for the international community regarding the provision of human security. "The reconstruction community's interventions in Afghanistan have been premised on the hope that conflict is over, rather than the reality that conflict persists,"⁷⁰ and the resurgence of the Taliban in a more effective, more deadly incarnation than the one ousted from power in 2001 threatens to undermine the entire

⁶⁸ CSIS, p. 29.

⁶⁹ ICISS, p. viii.

⁷⁰ Paula R. Newberg, "Neither Stable nor Stationary: The Politics of Transition and Recovery." *Building a New Afghanistan*. Robert I. Rotberg (Ed). (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2007), p. 83.

Afghanistan nation-building project. From a period of relative calm between 2002 and 2003, the conflict has again descended into outright violence and a protracted insurgency which has consistently resisted international military efforts to stamp it out. The ongoing inability of the international military forces to do so has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of NATO soldiers and thousands of Afghan civilians.

The failure thus far of ISAF to succeed in its mission has fuelled calls from certain quarters for a withdrawal and an end to international military involvement in Afghanistan. However, such a policy would no more cohere with the human security doctrine than does the current policy of insufficient troops and strategy-defeating-tactics. Having initiated a major nation-building undertaking in Afghanistan – and all the war-fighting, counterinsurgency, and institutional development such an effort entails – the international community, of which NATO and its members comprise an essential component, has an obligation to demonstrate the legitimacy of its actions in toppling the Taliban through the successful execution of the terms of the *Afghanistan Compact*. For this war to be a just war, a war consistent with the principles of the liberal societies that launched it, there must be security for the Afghan people. As put by one theorist, in a just war “the aggressor is responsible for all the consequences of the fighting he begins.”⁷¹ As a party to the conflict that has established for itself a set of human security guidelines, it is incumbent upon Canada to ensure that it takes all actions possible and necessary to prevent military tactics from undermining the overall goals of the mission.

Human security provides the conceptual bridge capable of linking military tactics with the broader strategic objectives being pursued by the international community in

⁷¹ Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1977), p. 23.

Afghanistan. Application of the principles of human security is a means by which the deficiencies of past military practice may be redressed, and which will likely result in greater success for both the state-building and counterinsurgency aspects of the Afghan mission. An international military operation grounded on human-centric principles, primarily preservation of the lives of Afghan civilians, is more likely to realize success in its ultimate goal of winning the support of the Afghan people and reducing their cooperation with and toleration of the Taliban-led insurgency. While effective counterinsurgency and human security are not synonymous, they are synchronous, meaning that the successful application of one is likely to result in advancements towards or satisfaction of the other. As described by recent changes to American counterinsurgency doctrine: "the cornerstone of any COIN effort is establishing security for the civilian populace. Without a secure environment, no permanent reforms can be implemented and disorder spreads."⁷² Strategies in any sector that improve human security will contribute towards the efficacy of counterinsurgency, and effective COIN will result in improved human security for the Afghan people. When combined, the application of human security principles to the execution of counterinsurgency will result in the most likely satisfaction of the objectives of both.

Conclusion

The current NATO and Canadian military operations in Afghanistan seem to have lost sight of their ultimate objective. Canada, as a participant in NATO and active combatant in southern Afghanistan, has implemented policies that fail to adhere to the

⁷² United States Department of the Army, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), p. 42.

principles of the human security doctrine. The NATO military effort, including Canadian forces, has failed in its primary mission to defeat the Taliban insurgency, largely as a result of the insufficient number of troops contributed by NATO members. Moreover, they continue to use excessive, and sometimes unnecessary, force in their conduct of war in Afghanistan, despite the maxim that “what injects political oxygen into terrorist campaigns is the security force that reacts with extreme measures.”⁷³ The campaign to win Afghanistan was always destined to be won or lost according to which side swayed the will of the Afghan people; a war as much over hearts and minds as over sand and rock. But NATO has failed to consistently act upon the imperatives of human security in favour of downplaying the need for combat by relying upon tactics that cost the least number of coalition soldiers and the greatest amount of Afghan goodwill.

The more battles NATO has fought the further it has come from winning. In the face of a violent insurgency, winning this conflict “requires removing the threats faced by the vast majority of Afghan civilians . . . Security in a post-conflict society finds its meaning in the notion of ‘human security’ which ensures the stability of the peaceful environment.”⁷⁴ Without military policies that focus themselves upon the human security of individual Afghans, the current mission in Afghanistan cannot be a success. Until Canada advocates such policies, implements them for its own soldiers, and adheres to the human security principles of which it has been a principal advocate, it shall continue to violate the central basic premise of the human security doctrine which has been the nominal foundation of its Afghan and foreign policies.

⁷³ Karzai, p. 72.

⁷⁴ Jalali, p. 40.

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