Human Security and Sovereignty – Case of Canada’s Foreign Policy for Human Security

Human security refers to securing the individual, where state sovereignty refers to the security of a state. In the increasingly interconnected world, the traditional structures of state sovereignty are no longer enough. Therefore, the underlying argument of this research is that traditional state sovereignty can be complemented with human security. Hence, sovereignty and human security form a continuum of a more inclusive security.

The purpose of this research is to demonstrate why Canada has integrated human security into its foreign policy and how the adoption of this policy has influenced the wider Canadian foreign policy. This is done by first providing an analysis on the main structures of both state sovereignty and human security. Second, Canada’s role as a peacekeeping nation and wealthy middle power state have influenced the decision for adopting such a policy. In addition, Canada’s multilateral diplomacy has played an important role in advancing human security agenda.

Third, Canada’s five human security agenda areas are introduced and analyzed in order to demonstrate how the human security agenda works and how it has influenced the overall foreign policy. These five areas are public safety, protection of civilians, conflict prevention, governance and accountability and peace support operations.

This research identifies three main issues that have influenced the overall Canadian foreign policy since the adoption of foreign policy for human security. First, the former Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy successfully introduced human security into Canada’s foreign policy. This left Canada with an actual human security foreign policy. Second, an important milestone was the Canadian government sponsored Responsibility to Protect – Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty in 2001. This report set out a shift towards commitment to the protection of civilians, hence providing greater human security. Third, Canada has taken active leadership role in major international projects to improve human security. The main successes have been the banning of landmines and the International Criminal Court. These successes have granted Canada more credibility on an international level. This research concludes that although Canada is to be applauded for its leadership role in advancing human security and following up with legislative action, there is a clear lack of financial dedication to the various human security areas and military investment towards peace support operations.

The primary sources used are Canadian government’s documents on human security and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade websites. Additionally, McRae and Hubert’s Human Security and the New Diplomacy provides a comprehensive overview of Canada’s long-term efforts in integrating human security into actual policy. Secondary sources include articles in academic journals, websites of non-governmental organizations and various UN organizations’ documents.