

**Summary of eDiscussion Policy Position Papers
on Failed and Fragile States**

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From September 26 to December 2, 2005, college and university students were invited to submit policy position papers to Foreign Affairs Canada on the issue of failed and fragile states. Webcast interviews with various experts on the topic were hosted on the Canadian International Policy site in order to stimulate and inform the debate. In total, sixteen policy papers were received from twelve different universities.

Participants unanimously agreed that Canada has a significant role to play in combating state fragility and failure. Much of the resultant debate surrounded how best to achieve this objective.

Below is a summary of some of the major questions, points of disagreement and recommendations that emerged in the policy position papers:

Conditions for Intervention

Conflicting views emerged on the government's strategy to intervene in failed and fragile states. On the one hand, a policy position paper from the University of British Columbia maintained that Canada should not base its decisions to intervene on strategic national interest, arguing that this would contravene our Responsibilities Agenda and the promotion of human security. In contrast, given that Canada cannot be present in all failed and fragile states, others felt that national interest should be one of several criteria that inform our choices of where and when to act. Beyond this debate a number of participants urged Canada to act in a manner consistent with its capacity and comparative advantages, as determined on a case-by-case basis.

Participants agreed that, faced with limited resources, Canada should not act unilaterally but rather channel its efforts through multilateral organizations to capitalize on the benefits of co-deployment. Several papers felt a policy of multilateralism and strong Canadian government cooperation with NGOs were integral to a more sustained commitment to prevention and reconstruction. Moreover, many suggested that Canada must leverage its influence in bodies such as the UN to motivate the international community to proactively address state failure and fragility.

Highlighting the need for strict guidelines and a coherent government strategy on failed and fragile states, three papers advocated the development of intervention criteria weighting Canada's ability to intervene (according to access, expertise and available resources) with the level of domestic support for human rights and governance conditions within the fragile state.

Politics of Engagement

The extent to which Canada should aid countries that currently follow undemocratic modes of rule was an area of contention. Opinions differed as to whether, when intervening in failed and failing states, Canada should aim to institute democracy immediately, ensure stability in order to bring about democracy, or promote stability as the sole end to avoid imposing liberal, democratic values. Although no consensus was reached, a widely held position was that, in the short term, managing stability term is more important than contributing to democracy.

In achieving this stability there was a general consensus on the need for basic security (physical safety) and goods such as such as food, water and shelter. It was felt that, where these basic goods were not being provided by the state, Canada had a responsibility to act. In addition, participants felt that, where action is required, Canada should collaborate closely with NGOs, described as well-placed and equipped to supply these basic goods when local governments fail to do so. According to some, this collaboration could set the stage for Canada to eventually transfer control and functions to them.

Nearly all policy position papers emphasized that Canada's approach to failed and fragile states must reflect the need for long-term engagement. For example, the paper from Mount Allison University stated that: "Canada needs to enter with clear goals in mind, and be prepared to remain involved until those goals have been attained."

Prevention and Early Warning

In addition to policies targeted at intervention in failed and fragile states, participants agreed on the imperative for Canada to focus on conflict prevention and early warning. St. Mary's University suggested placing greater emphasis on the role of education in preventing state failure. The paper argues that education is a key to prevention as it fights intolerance, which can be an important factor in preventing genocide; stems the spread of AIDS; and assists in economic development.

The policy paper produced by St. Mary's University also explicitly underscored the need for a concentration on the 'Responsibility to Protect' doctrine, which they argue to be "the most important and effective mechanism by which to protect civilian populations." Participants from the University of British Columbia highlighted the need to improve the United Nation's rapid response and early warning mechanisms as well as increase Canadian participation in 'Friends of Rapid Deployment' and the 'Information and Strategic Analysis Secretariat' of the UN. .

Participants lamented what they felt was a lack of attention to economic development in the IPS. To facilitate a more substantial engagement on this front, several papers advocated raising Canada's official development assistance spending to 0.7% of GDP by 2015.

Socio-economic development was seen as a key component to mitigating crisis and preventing future problems. The University of Calgary argued that any Canadian policy on failed and fragile states should focus on substantively supporting local economic development, through micro-credit schemes and private sector development. Furthermore, this paper challenged past Canadian economic engagement in failed and fragile states, charging that “the current debt relief regime penalizes countries who manage their debt well by only considering states that face an unsustainable debt burden.” Hence, it was argued that Canadian debt relief should also include good performers.

Public Diplomacy

Generally, participants expressed the need to raise public awareness in order for Canadians to gain a better understanding of the context of state failure, to shape public opinion and to gain public support. For example, the paper by Wilfrid Laurier University stressed that: “there is public will to support programs in long time frames if the government is clear and consistent with a strong case to make for the commitment”. The need for the Canadian government to support tangible projects that can easily be grasped by the public was considered essential to gain public support. Several policy position papers also recommended a more active participation by civil society actors such as diaspora groups. In this regard, two papers suggested that by incorporating Haitian and Afghan civil society into the process of failed and fragile state interventions, tasks could eventually be transferred over to the local communities, creating sustainable development.

A suggestion was also made that Canada enhance public diplomacy by creating communication networks as part of what the authors described as the “fourth block”¹, to actively convey Canada's international intentions to Canadian citizen: “Canadians need to know why our service members are overseas [...] and, which tactics they are using and why” (Royal Military College of Canada). The article explains that there is a need for active engagement of national pride, interest and education and that a more robust Canadian government communication strategy was required to foster this.

Broad Trends

While the policy position papers generally support the ideas and initiatives discussed in the IPS (such as START, Responsibility to protect and Human Security Agenda) on failed and fragile states, they shared concern about a lack of effective action to realise these ideas. According to the paper by Wilfred Laurier University, “The IPS is a general statement that does not specify enough concrete actions [...] it must be made real in

¹ The notion of a ‘fourth block’ makes allusion to “the three-block war”, a term first coined by General Charles Krulak, the 31st Commandant of the United States Marine Corps. This concept describes the complex spectrum of challenges faced by soldiers on the modern battlefield. For example, soldiers today might move from feeding and clothing displaced refugees or providing humanitarian assistance (Block 1) to stabilization, or peace support operations (Block 2) to engagement in high-intensity fighting (Block 3). The three-block war concept has now been adopted by several countries.

implementation, not just look good in design”. Several participants advocated the development of a more detailed strategy on failed and fragile states than is presented in the IPS and cited the need for specific indicators of what constitutes a failed or fragile state. For example, one participant suggested that a list of failed and fragile states be developed by the government and used to inform resource allocation and political decision-making.

Similar to the eDiscussion summary, there was agreement that failed and fragile cities play a role in the stabilization or destabilization of failed or fragile states. A paper by the University of Winnipeg noted that “There are failed and fragile cities within healthy states, just as there are thriving urban centres within failing states.” Certain participants felt that new methods must be devised to promote the development of fragile cities. For example, it was recommended that two task forces be created to devise solutions to the distinct problems faced by inhabitants of rural and urban areas showing signs of fragility or failure. Participants also noted that security in rural areas is inexorably tied to security in urban areas and that many of the solutions to urban human security challenges therefore lie outside the cities. For example, they explained that urban slums are often the product of mass rural migration to urban areas, as individuals move in search of economic opportunity. Rural development was therefore described as critical to the promotion of human security in already overcrowded cities.

Foreign Affairs Reply to Summary

A summary of the views presented in the policy position papers during the eDiscussion has been received within Foreign Affairs Canada and is currently being reviewed by policy planners.

Their response will be posted on the Canadian International Policy site in February 2006. It will provide the authors of the position papers with reactions to their ideas as well as background information about Canada's current and emerging approach to failed and fragile states.