FAMILY: THE NATURAL STARTING POINT FOR CANADA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The following is adapted from a paper submitted to the "Dialogue on Foreign Policy" launched by the Department of Foreign Affairs in January 2003.
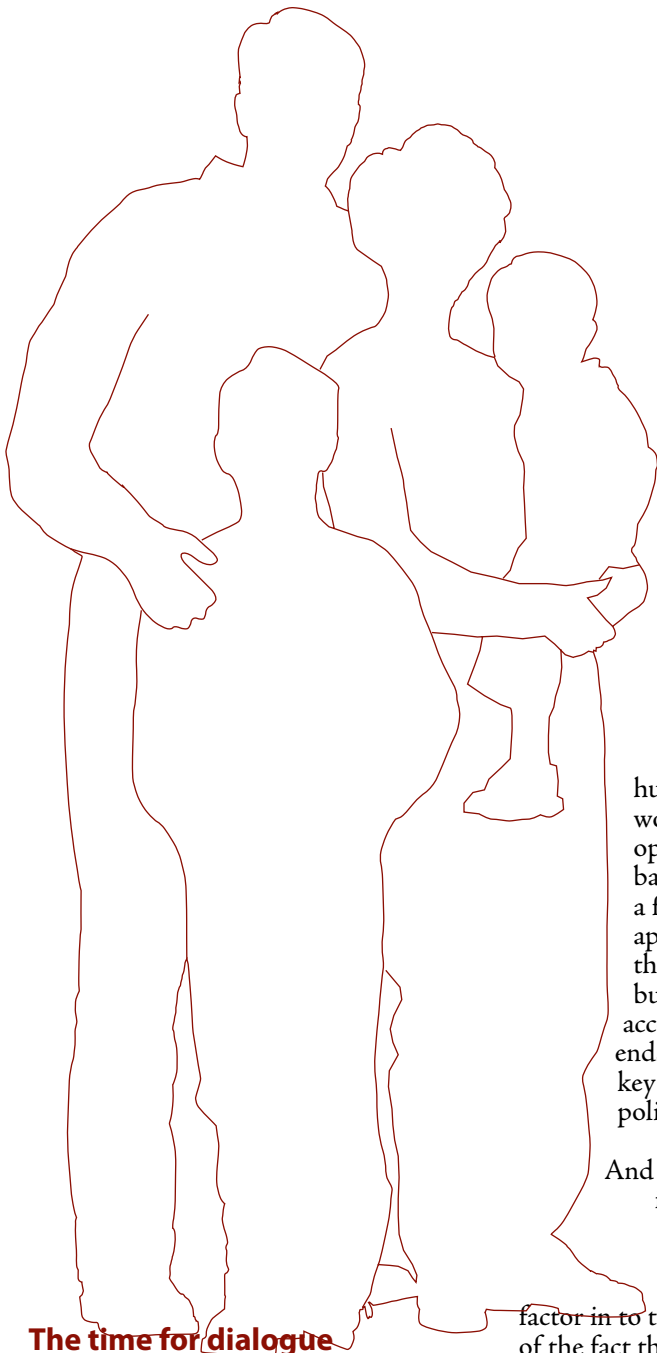
The time for dialogue

The war in Iraq has prompted Canadians to reflect closely on the role of Canada in the world. Emotions run high as we are faced with difficult issues such as how and when one chooses to cooperate with historic allies, the justness of military intervention in foreign nations, and the role of multilateral institutions in political and military decision making. These are all serious concerns that merit public debate. All of these concerns, however, turn towards the more fundamental concerns about the human condition. Making the world more peaceful, ensuring opportunity for all, awarding basic human rights for all are a few examples. The most appropriate means to achieve these ends are hotly debated, but the ends are widely accepted. And in fact, those ends have consistently been key themes in Canada's foreign policy.

And yet, the family—the institution through which so many of us have first learned about these concerns—does not factor in to the debate. This is in spite of the fact that the themes of security, prosperity, values, and culture identified by the Government of Canada in the 2003 Dialogue on Foreign Policy discussion paper begin with the family. The family is the first guarantor of human security and the place where the building blocks of prosperity are constructed. It is the first forum where children learn values and develop their cultural identity.

Perhaps it is because they are so obvious at one level or another that these facts go unaddressed in debates on foreign policy. Yet the time to challenge that prevailing omission, and to encourage a dialogue on explicit recognition of the role of family could not be better. Certainly if our foreign policy framework is to be representative of Canadian values it needs to make reference to the family

International antecedents

Family—if it is at all a part of a nation's policy framework—is generally assumed to be a domestic priority, as part of the range of social concerns that are often the focus of domestic political activity. In contrast, foreign policy, from a traditionalist view, is about the issues of "hard power"—the rivalries of nation states for influence and power—not about the issues of "soft power" affecting mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, and children. Whereas family is micro, foreign policy is macro. Whereas family is personal, foreign policy is political. Whereas family is local, foreign policy is global, or at least regional. In short, the link between family and foreign policy is not immediately obvious.

And yet, the United Nations, that most macro, political, and global of institutions, in its principal document, the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights, makes explicit mention of the family:

The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State. (UDHR Article 16, 1948) The drafters of the UDHR were a remarkable group of individuals from a range of backgrounds, led by outspoken human rights activist Eleanor Roosevelt. The debates they had in the drafting of this charter, the first global charter of human rights, were long and intense.[1] Many issues were suggested for inclusion, but ultimately not included as they were deemed less worthy of specific mention in the UDHR. Family, however, was included. Moreover, the family is described in three very specific ways that deserve attention.

First, the family is described as something that occurs naturally in society—i.e., it is not the creation of the state, but pre-exists the state. Family is a social organization which pre-figures all other social organizations. In fact, it has historically formed the basis of those other organizations. In societies around the world, kinship ties have historically been the principal basis for political entities—clans, tribes, and communities have had the blood ties of family at their core. Where those blood ties have been absent, these other entities often took over their role.

The significance of these ties is still apparent in today's world, where complex political organizations have evolved. In the course of our daily conduct we refer to parent organizations, to fraternal societies, to family-owned enterprises. In many global societies, ties of kinship remain fundamental in political and business organizations, so much so that we often feel obliged to institute laws against nepotism to avoid undue favours being afforded to those to whom we are naturally bonded.

Second, the family is defined as being the fundamental group unit of society. In other words, the institution of the family is the single most important building block of other social organizations. The family is the school in which one first learns social behavior, rights and responsibilities, and how to live and work with others. It is the forum in which one

first learns about human relationships and the rewards and demands of living with our fellow human beings. Fathers, mothers, their children, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, other blood-related and adopted kin are all defined by their relationship to the family—to this basic social entity.

> **The primary responsibility for the protection, upbringing and development of children rests with the family.**
> (UN Special Session on Children)

Third, the family is defined as being entitled to protection by society and the State. In other words, each of us as individuals in society are called upon to protect the institution of the family, and the State itself is compelled to explicitly protect this institution. In terms of individual protection, the idea is manifested daily, as people speak of and respect the family obligations they have and that others have. In terms of state protection, the laws protecting the family, or laws that have their roots in protecting the family, are myriad—in respect to child care, taxation regimes and property, for example.

The institution of the family was identified in 1948 as the building block of societies around the world—irrespective of race, culture, creed or any other distinguishing characteristic. But that idea is not a dated one. In one of the most significant recent international conventions, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the essential role of the family is recognized:

Convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community…" (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Preamble, 1990)

And more recently, in 2002, at the UN Special Session on Children marking the 10th anniversary of efforts to implement

the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the theme was reiterated, and given stronger emphasis:

The family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened. It is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support. The primary responsibility for the protection, upbringing and development of children rests with the family. (UN Special Session on Children, Outcome Document, Para. 15, 2002)

These and other explicit references to family in international documents give one a deeper appreciation of how family has become a consistent subject matter for international dialogue.

Domestic antecedents

In its most recent foreign policy "mission statement," Canada in the World (1995), the Government of Canada identified the promotion of Canadian cultural values, including respect for human rights, as the third "pillar" of Canada's foreign policy:

A priority field of international concern and action for Canadians has been and remains that of human rights. The Government regards respect for human rights not only as a fundamental value, but also as a crucial element in the development of stable, democratic and prosperous societies at peace with each other. From the drafting of the UDHR to that of the recently concluded Convention on the Rights of the Child, Canada has been in the vanguard of the international consensus to uphold human freedoms and dignity.

This was simply the last in what has been a long series of efforts by Canada to promote the values of its citizens abroad. This perhaps demonstrates how the nation has internalized the point made by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, in 1877, that, "The only way to defend one's ideas and principles is to make them known."[2]

Consistent with that approach, the Dialogue asked Canadians: which values and what aspects of our culture do we wish to project today? A good starting point in answering this questions is to look to what we have consistently defended over the sixty years since the end of World War II, when Canada first

began to make its voice heard in the international forum.

In 1947, Louis St. Laurent, then External Affairs Minister, gave his landmark "Gray Lecture" at the University of Toronto.[3] St. Laurent outlined the values underlying Canada's foreign policy. These values, as he described them, helped define us as Canadians: national unity, political liberty, the rule of law, the values of a Christian civilization (which includes the integral importance of the family), and the acceptance of international responsibility.

Lester Pearson referred to this set of principles as his "checklist" for foreign policy making.[4] In 1967, Canada's centennial year, then External Affairs Minister, Paul Martin Sr. restated St. Laurent's principles and added to them social justice and economic development. A recent article in Policy Options suggests that, in the post-Cold War environment of the St. Laurent-Pearson era, the vision of Canadian values remains as relevant as ever.[5] And a recent study found that most Canadians still believe that Canada has a moral obligation to the world and would like to see Canadian values adopted abroad.[6] In the 1995 foreign policy review, Canada in the World, the Government of Canada proposed four themes: human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and sustainable development. As mentioned above, the 2003 Dialogue identified three overriding themes: protecting the security of our nation and contributing to global security; increasing prosperity in Canada and expanding global prosperity; and promoting the values and culture that Canadians cherish, to help make a better Canada and a better world. That list builds on the tradition of articulating our values in foreign policy begun with St. Laurent and developed by Pearson and Martin—a tradition that continues today.

Domestic policies and values determine foreign policy. The principles identified in 1947, 1967, and 1995 reflect a consistent perspective of Canada's active foreign policy pronouncements on the international stage. The commitment to certain core values for our own conduct, combined with a sense of responsibility to help others has governed our affairs

for close to sixty years.

Canadians are proud of this fact, and show every indication of wanting to stay the course. And this brings us to the family. Part of staying the course has been a consistent articulation of a commitment to the family. Canada's signature on the numerous international legal instruments and United Nations conference documents wherein the family is defended is a testament to this commitment (see above). With respect to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Canada was a vocal supporter of the document and instrumental in promoting its near universal ratification.

The powerful declarations in these documents have inspired many, and they reflect a strong national reality. Canadians have consistently expressed their desire for a healthy, stable family life and a promising future for their children.

Public opinion polls have repeatedly shown the high priority Canadians place on family. In the 1999 "National Election for the Rights of Youth" conducted by UNICEF and Elections Canada, with 24 per cent of the votes among 10 possible alternatives, young people chose the right to live within a family with their parents as the most important right.[7] Family was considered even more important than health, food and shelter. In the same year, a CBC/Maclean's poll found that 93%

> Canadians have consistently expressed their desire for a healthy, stable family life and a promising future for their children.

of Canadians ranked the preservation of traditional family values as 'very important.'[8] A 2002 poll conducted by the Strategic Counsel found that over 80 per cent of Canadians agreed that encouraging strong families should be a top priority of governments of Canada.[9]

An obvious focus then, is to direct this domestic value, as articulated in various international declarations, into practical aspects of our foreign policy framework.

The opportunity to translate Canada's commitment to the family into concrete, practical initiatives that will guide program implementation strategies is an approach to our development policy that has yet to be seized.

A timely initiative for the rest of the world

The 2003 Dialogue, with its focus on Canada's foreign policy framework, followed on from the 2002 policy statement by The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Strengthening Aid Effectiveness. CIDA placed a strong emphasis on effectiveness, similar to Dialogue's caution that we cannot be everywhere and do everything in our foreign policy. It is appropriate that our international development policy have similar goals to that of our overall foreign policy, for it is a subset of that foreign policy. While perhaps seen in the past as the luxury of budget surpluses, development aid is increasingly being seen in the west as a security priority. Unprecedented demographic changes in nations, the AIDS epidemic, and concerns about environmental degradation are not merely secondary concerns, but first-order priorities in foreign policy. Addressing these issues goes to the heart of Canada's fundamental objectives for peace, security, and the rule of law.

For example, a very specific recognition of this link was made in 2001, with the creation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). In it, African leaders recognize that they have a pressing duty to reduce poverty and an obligation to place their countries, both individually and collectively, on the path to sustainable socio-economic growth, and in turn, political stability. Canada responded quickly and determinedly, with the creation of the Canada Fund for Africa in the December 2001 budget—a $500-million fund to support the G8 Africa Action Plan and NEPAD. From these resources, Canada recently contributed $100 million to an African Investment Fund.[10]

Demonstrating the link between foreign policy and development assistance more clearly, then Prime Minister Chrétien made NEPAD a central theme of the

G8 summit hosted in Canada in June 2002 and further committed Canada to NEPAD in the September 2002 throne speech:

Canada has a long history of contributing solutions to global problems. We will continue to speak out in every forum for the values of pluralism, freedom and democracy, and contribute to reducing the growing global divide between rich and poor. We will double our development assistance by the year 2010, and earmark at least half of that increase for Africa as part of Canada's support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development.[11]

The February 2003 budget reflected this commitment by guaranteeing an eight percent annual increase in Canada's international assistance. The focus on Africa due to NEPAD presents an unprecedented opportunity to craft and implement policies which factor the needs of the family into the development process. The G8 endorsement of NEPAD rightfully commits to major investments in countries that govern justly, invest in their own people and promote economic freedom.

The NEPAD initiative is but one example of why a new focus on family in foreign policy would be timely. The reality around the world is that the vast majority of human beings are found living within families—whether structured as two-parent, single parent, blended or multigenerational. A family

focus as a theme of foreign policy is a sound course of action because it builds on this reality.

Around the world, the family performs many essential functions which governmental policies should support, because it is both cost effective and efficient, and also because it is a 'people-centered' approach to achieving results. Policy that can operate from the ground

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up as well as the top down—as is the case with policy that focuses on the family—has a much better chance of having impact.

Moving forward with our foreign policy

In the introduction to this piece, the point was made that the family is the starting point for human security and prosperity; that it is the first forum where children learn values and develop their cultural identity. This reality is often lost on decision-makers where such simple realities are obscured by a maze of complex policy design and implementation. The growing body of scholarship demonstrating the

correlation between family and the well-being of society is significant. Increasing empirical evidence shows that the best living environment for all human beings—anywhere in the world—is a stable family.[12]

Food, shelter, safety, opportunity—these are universal needs and desires of people everywhere, but are expressed in a variety of ways. People all over the world consistently place a strong emphasis on family and kinship ties, a factor that must be taken into account for any successful foreign policy strategy. Just as the existence of stable families domestically will assist in efforts to improve the overall well-being of Canadians, so too will support for stable families throughout the world promote the development of secure, prosperous societies, reflective of shared values and respectful of cultural diversity. Acknowledging this fact is consistent with the UDHR's vision and modern socio-political realities.

The trends of the last decade—globalization, growing concern about environmental degradation, increase in the rate of HIV/AIDS, ongoing civil strife in Africa—have posed new challenges to Canada in articulating effective foreign and development policy. With Canada's long tradition of commitment to extending assistance to others, the desire to promote our values abroad, and the NEPAD strategy, we are uniquely poised to become a leader in policy innovation. Despite the complexities of prioritizing goals, addressing the role and needs of the family is imperative in policy development.

As an integral part of what it means to be Canadian, the value of family must be clear in our foreign policy framework. Investing in families will reap a greater return as communities, societies and nations are empowered to grow. As Canada's 1995 Foreign Policy Review put it, "The basic infrastructure that underpins society must be in place, along with policies that promote sustainable economic growth with equity." Nothing is more important than the strength of families that form the foundation of societies around the world. 🍁

ENDNOTES

[1] For a thorough account of the UDHR drafting see, Glendon M.A. (2001). A world made new: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. New York: Random House.
[2] Foreign Affairs Canada. (1995). Canada in the world: Canadian foreign policy review 1995. Section V. Retrieved from http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/foreign_policy/cnd-world/menu-en.asp
[3] St. Laurent, L. (1970). The foundations of Canadian policy in world affairs. In R.A. Mackay (Ed.) Canadian foreign policy 1945–1954: Selected speeches and documents (pp. 388-389). Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd.
[4] Pearson, L.B. (1973). Mike: The memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson (Vol. 2). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 26.
[5] Maloney, S.M. (2001, December). Canadian values and national security policy: Who decides? Policy Options, 45-49.
[6] Mendelsohn, M. (2002, November). Canada's social contract: Evidence from public opinion. Canadian Policy Research Networks, discussion paper P/01. Retrieved from http://www.cprn.com/documents/15075_en.PDF
[7] Elections Canada. (1999, November). National Election for the Rights of Youth.
[8] See CBC/Maclean's 1999 poll.
[9] See Strategic Counsel 2002 poll.
[10] Canadian International Development Agency. (2002, 20 November). News release.
[11] The Canada we want. (2002, 30 September). Speech from the Throne to open the second session of the 37th Parliament of Canada.
[12] For a thorough examination of the important role played by families around the world, see Zeitlin, M.F., Megawangi, R., Kramer, E.M., Colletta, N.D., Babatunde, E.D., & Garman, D. (1995). Strengthening the family: Implications for international development.
New York: United Nations University Press. Also, see Rogusky, D. (2002). Building a healthy nation: Policies to encourage strong marriages and stable families. Retrieved from http://www.fotf.ca/familyfacts/analysis/020101.html