

Comments on “Nuclear Waste Management in Canada: The Security Dimension” by Professor Franklyn Griffiths

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Dr. Griffiths has done an admirable job of identifying a few of the key issues that policymakers, NGOs and members of civil society wrestle with when discussing nuclear waste and its management, given the conflicting national and human security objectives. How do you energize public engagement? Who will take the leadership? What kind of campaign can be mounted to offset the powerful forces and interests arrayed on behalf of a warrior world? What are we in Canada capable of doing and are there the political will, public interest and overall competence to tackle the job?

In our current globalized world, security has become a critical issue. Globalization has brought a “dark side”: the attack upon the basic integrity of people. There is now a distinct threat of the spread of weapons of mass destruction into the hands of warlords, terrorists, extremists and fanatics. The idea of nuclear waste falling into the wrong hands and being turned into a weapon heightens existing concerns over human security. The very concept of “human security,” as Griffiths points out, places the risk of individuals as its central issue, rather than the nation-state as a territory to protect.

If there is to be a reassertion of multilateral efforts on disarmament, it will have to come from a coalition representing a broad range of civil and public interest, along with like-minded states. This kind of partnership runs counter to the conventional approach to disarmament negotiation, which suggest they are beyond the ken of ordinary folk. For civil-society advocates, the experience of the land-mine treaty remains a model of how to achieve democratic decision making, as Griffiths points out in his article. For professional diplomats, it is an incursion into their private preserve. For governments such as those of the US, China and Russia who follow a hard-power agenda, it is anathema to their view of how the world should be run.

Which doesn't say there isn't a role for the national security framework as discussed in Professor Griffiths' article (*Axworthy, page 38*). Pierre Trudeau's 1984 peace mission on nuclear disarmament is an example of someone with the credibility of the Canadian prime minister was necessary to break the log-jam of silence that characterized the disarmament issue. This was Canada as an independent voice, defining a leading role for Canada in establishing norms of global behaviour and rules of law and advocating inclusive decision making on issues that affect all humankind.

If controlling small arms is so challenging, imagine how difficult it is to persuade nations to rethink their nuclear strategies. As Foreign Minister, I urged the Canadian government to try to have NATO review its nuclear policy. As long as NATO retained the “political” value of nuclear weapons, it was hard to make the case for restraint (*Axworthy, page 354*). I was told that was not likely to happen. As Albert Einstein once said, “The unleashed power of the atom changed everything save our modes of thinking.” The idea of focusing protection on people rather than on nations, of changing the international system towards criminal threats not military aggression, of

working towards multilateral cooperation, and not relying just on individual defences does not fit their world view of *realpolitik*.

In the post-9/11 world, counter-terrorism has become the new crusade. It is the litmus test of loyalty to the faith. It is primarily a military response, non-collaborative in approach and defiantly opposed to most forms of international efforts at alternative solutions.

If we want to successfully combat terrorism --and all those who threaten the security of innocent people, whether they be commuters on a plane to Los Angeles, children in Northern Uganda, bomb victims in the Middle East or kidnapped civilians in Colombia-- then we need to apply the common sense and pragmatism of a human security approach.

If we don't, any attempt to deter global criminal activity is doomed to failure. And unless and until we can strike a better balance and forge a different pathway based on human-security principles, we also face a serious regression in the level of international co-operation on a myriad of crucial global issues and the receding of hope of a more peaceable, secure world.

Terrorism may never be eliminated, but its attraction can be significantly diminished by addressing causes: poverty, despair, disenfranchisement, religious fanaticism, absence of effective and meaningful democracy, etc. Some of these efforts have already been undertaken. They are complex, resource-intensive and require innovative international co-operation. This is a human-security approach, a chance to present an alternative, rather than exacerbating the cause of terrorism and creating further resentments in the world.

Still, prevention may be the most effective tool against a possible attack. By engaging the population in nuclear waste management, the approach shifts from national to human security. Furthermore, building an effective global network of law enforcement and justice that applies the same capacity for collaborative action that terrorists themselves often employ can substantially deter terrorism. Efforts to dismantle or ignore collaborative action only strengthen the terrorist ability to undermine an effective response.

We painstakingly put together the elements of a distinctive nuclear policy for Canada in the 90s. It is time to do it again and the proliferation of weapons to non-state actors make the risks more complex. There is real evidence of the growing disconnect between what people want from their governments and what is in fact being delivered. Nowhere is this more urgent than in the containment of the tools of war. Letting people have more say on governing our policy on nuclear issues would be the most effective way of ensuring that democracy works.

Axworthy, L. (2003). *Navigating a New World: Canada's Global Future*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Company.