

Roundtable Report

Migration and Security: September 11 and Implications for Canada's Policies

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Abstract

On March 15, 2002, the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development, in partnership with the Centre for Refugee Studies at York University, held a roundtable meeting in Toronto to assess the implications for Canada's policies concerning migration resulting from the terrorist attacks of September 11. The purpose of this event was to draw on the knowledge and insight of participants from a wide range of civil society sectors to inform policy development. Discussants proposed a coherent framework for Canada's migration policy that emphasizes the safety and well-being of migrants. Policy advice generated from this roundtable concerns Canada's overall approach to migration policy; Canada's immigration and refugee system; and continental and international implications for Canada's policies.

Résumé

Le 15 mars 2002 s'est tenu à Toronto une table ronde organisée conjointement par le Centre canadien pour le développement de la politique étrangère (CCDPE), et le Centre for Refugee Studies de l'université York dans le but d'évaluer les implications des politiques canadiennes en matière d'immigration après les attentats terroristes du 11 septembre. Le but de la réunion était de puiser dans le réservoir de connaissance et de discernement des participants provenant d'horizons très divers de la société civile afin de guider le développement des politiques. Les panélistes ont proposé une structure cohérente pour la politique du Canada en matière de migration qui met l'emphase sur la sécurité et le bien-être des migrants. Les recommandations politiques issues de cette table ronde

ont trait à l'approche d'ensemble du Canada en matière de politique sur la migration, le système canadien relatif à l'immigration et aux réfugiés, et les implications continentales et internationales des politiques du Canada.

Introduction

Links between migration and security issues have acquired renewed relevance in the post-September 11 context. Recognizing this, the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development, in partnership with the Centre for Refugee Studies at York University, organized this meeting to explore the policy implications of migration and security in light of September 11. Participation consisted of individuals from academia, the NGO/IGO community, and government. The event was one of a series of roundtables supported by the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development in response to September 11.

This report outlines discussions on key issue areas as well as the domestic and international policy implications. (It does not necessarily reflect the opinions of all roundtable participants.) Roundtable participants proposed a coherent approach to post-September 11 migration policy, emphasizing the safety and well-being of migrants. The policy advice generated from this event was the result of a consensus at the roundtable on the changing nature of the concept of security in the post-Cold War context; evolving trends in Canadian migration policy; and new challenges for migration policy in light of September 11.

Context: Global Migration Trends

Given the rapid population growth in developing countries, for some, the pressure to migrate will become stronger. As well, political instability, environmental factors, and ethno-religious conflict are further reasons behind an upsurge in

global migration. It was agreed that people leave their countries of origin because of disparities in human security. Global migration is sure to continue, regardless of any change at the policy level. The difference now compared to earlier periods of history is that migration primarily involves people of lesser economic means. The challenge of the twenty-first century will be to reconsider traditionally held notions of citizenship. As well, the concerns of internally displaced persons (IDPs) have acquired renewed significance.

Theoretical Basis: The Changing Nature of Security Discourse

Participants noted that conventionally, security was seen as the protection of states from military threats to their sovereignty. Keeping with this conception, migration was not seen as a genuine security issue, with the notable exception of the mass movement of people resulting from military warfare. In the post-Cold War era, however, there has been a profound rethinking, by some, of the concept of security. This debate began with the sectoral security paradigm envisaged by the Copenhagen School, which included political/economic security, social security, and environmental security. Though this provided some scope for linking migration and security, the state remained at the centre, argued roundtable participants.

The shift in emphasis from protection of the state to protection of all people only developed through emergence of the Human Security perspective. From the Canadian standpoint, Human Security is defined as a "people-centred approach to foreign policy which recognizes that lasting stability cannot be achieved until people are protected from violent threats to their rights, safety or lives."¹ Referring to this change as a "humanistic breakthrough," it was argued that the human security paradigm was successful in broadening the definition of the concept to encompass the security of all people. Building on this, it was noted that in the post-September 11 world, Human Security has been universalized in academic and policy circles. How this model will be articulated remains a continuing challenge for Canada. Recognizing this, roundtable discussants recommended that in terms of migration, security should be defined as threats to people's security *as they move and once they arrive at their destination*. Therefore, the security of the migrants must be protected and discourse must be modified to reflect this reality. Discussants were also quick to point out that despite the post-Cold War emphasis on democracy and human rights, these two cornerstones of human security have been instituted at low levels. As well, the mere presence of democratic institutions does not imply human rights will be safeguarded.

Conceptions of Security Post-September 11

It was argued that the post-September 11 international system remains fragmented and, recognizing this, decisive factors will be political rather than military. However, despite previous gains in Human Security, the concept of security has become re-militarized after September 11. For instance, the term has been recast by some to refer to "protection of the state from terrorists." Others noted that the term "security" has become a fashionable way to cover a much wider array of issues. In addition, security of "the nation" has acquired greater significance. In particular, further emphasis has been placed on protecting notions of "national values." Keeping with this trend, citizenship has been linked to duties, obligations, responsibilities, and vague notions of civilization. As well, human rights and democratization may suffer with the military pursuit of terrorist groups. Finally, it was argued that the seeming preparedness of the Canadian public to relinquish their civil liberties for the sake of "security" is troubling. By contrast, one participant suggested that the depth of the response to September 11 may offer a strategic opening for a redefinition of security.

Trends in Canadian Migration Policy

Historically, Canada has faced the continuing challenge of maintaining the security of labour to support the security of capital, participants noted. In addition, concerns with "national culture" figured prominently in Canadian migration policy. However, notions of a single, unified national culture became untenable due to changing demographic patterns. Trade also became linked to the security of capital, with Canadian migration policy serving this need. More recently, it was argued that concerns with terror have been linked with hegemonic security. Participants also pointed out that an increasing number of workers enter Canada on temporary work permits, from periods ranging from a few months to several years. The needs of these would-be migrants should be more actively pursued.

Concerns for the Canadian Immigration and Refugee System Post-September 11

On a conceptual level, it was argued that the interpretation that migrants are a security threat to the receiving country is problematic. The focus should thus be shifted to the security of the migrants, or the marginalized population. Hence, a tension exists between the security of the state and the security of the migrants. A shift towards a state-centred definition of security marginalizes those outside of the state framework, such as internally displaced persons (IDPs). Finally, others emphasized that it is troubling that the categories of migrants (e.g., refugees, IDPs, etc.) are becoming more blurred.

More specifically, in the Canadian context, participants argued, the post-September 11 political climate has engendered renewed attacks on the refugee determination system. In addition, refugees have been more easily scapegoated as potential terrorists or factors that cause harm to society. Slight changes have also occurred in the treatment of newcomers by immigration officials, including increased detention and a lack of entitlement to legal rights. Increased racial profiling was another observation noted by participants. The Canadian visa system has also been the subject of criticism, for which it has been labelled a “soft target.”

Policy Recommendations

1. General

Overall, policy makers should continue to use the Human Security model. More specifically, participants recommended that Canada develop a systematic approach to address the root causes of migration. This would include addressing the multiple interacting determinants of ethnic conflict and terrorist activities, including demographic, environmental, and inequality, both within and between countries. In doing so, the gap between policy and practice must be redressed. To this end, a two-pronged scheme should be adopted that addresses the root causes at the ground level while restructuring immigration policy. Others suggested that Canada harmonize its various migration policies. Efforts should also be made to find means of integrating the advice and expertise of refugees living in Canada.

In addition, post-September 11 security issues cannot adequately be redressed through a migration review. Rather, Canada should concentrate on improving the intelligence system in order to detect these threats more effectively. As well, a multi-layered plan including surveillance, increased airport security, and better coordination between different agencies should be implemented. It was agreed that tougher measures against would-be migrants would not resolve security problems.

2. Recommendations for Canada's Immigration and Refugee System

Keeping with recent studies warning of the repercussions of a population decline, Canada should “broaden its door” to accept more immigrants. To this end, Canada's immigration system should develop further schemes for economic migrants. In addition to programs for professional immigrants, Canada should also focus on attracting skilled tradespeople.

It was also recommended that Canada increase its service allocation for refugees and other migrants, partly due to reasons related to September 11. As well, increased support should be allocated toward training front-line workers in

cultural sensitivity and country conditions. Further supervision should be instituted in order to ensure that proper service standards are maintained. As well, further attempts should be made to recruit experienced staff familiar with the country conditions of would-be migrants. Most participants agreed that racial profiling should be abandoned in favour of random checks; others noted that both methods are ineffective.

Human rights also figured prominently in discussions, with calls for the implementation of a human rights framework in all migration and security policies. Refugee claimants should also be granted full access to legal rights, as societal security must not override individual rights. To this end, refugee claimants to Canada should have the right to choose the location of their first claim. Further, participants emphasized that mandatory detention should be avoided at all costs.

3. Continental and International Policy Implications

Participants agreed that Canada should not implement a common border policy with the United States. On this issue, Canada should resist attempts to create a Schengen-type policy. While information-sharing should continue with the United States, Canada should not support attempts to develop joint bodies devoted to migration policy. In addition, participants recommended that a standing committee review all bilateral agreements on migration policy with the United States. Canada should also develop requirements for stakeholder involvement, transparency, and further democratization of the process. Finally, in a bilateral memorandum of understanding on migration policy, Canada should not sacrifice the safeguards it offers to refugee claimants, especially the location from which asylum claims can be made.

On the international level, the Canadian government should uphold its international obligations while developing policy. It was also suggested that Canada formulate a policy that views international migration in relation to development issues (i.e., human rights, governance, and social justice) and international development in relation to migration issues. As well, development assistance should be linked to peace-building, strengthening civil society, and media freedom in order to help resolve conflicts that cause international migration.

Finally, to safeguard migrant rights, Canada should sign and implement provisions of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.² Participants also noted that Canada should implement the recommendations of the Report on Canada (2000) of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.³

Conclusion

Roundtable participants proposed a policy that emphasizes the rights and safety of migrants, in opposition to calls for further measures to protect the societal security of the state. As well, in order to address security pressures resulting from September 11, the Canadian government must apply a holistic approach requiring coordination of all relevant government agencies. This framework must address the root causes of international migration and global conflict while ensuring that Canada does not abrogate its international obligations. Finally, the roundtable emphasized that Canada should remain active in ensuring that migration is a prominent issue on the international level.

Notes

1. "Human Security Program," on-line: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Human Security Homepage: <http://www.humansecurity.gc.ca/psh_brief-e.asp> (date accessed: May 9, 2002).
2. "International Convention on the Protection of the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families," on-line: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) Homepage <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/m_mwctoc.htm> (date accessed: May 9, 2002).
3. "Report on Canada (2000)," on-line: Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Homepage: <<http://www.cidh.org/countryrep/Canada2000en/table-of-contents.htm>> (date accessed: May 9, 2002).

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