

Canada Needs a Peace Agenda

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A condensed version of a op ed co-authored by Allan Rock that appeared in the Toronto Star last Friday

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Canada is embarking on a major military build-up, committing to NATO's new defence target of 5 percent of GDP by 2035. Some modernization is necessary after years of neglect. But if new military spending comes at the expense of diplomacy and international development, Canada risks weakening the very tools that prevent wars from starting.

Security cannot be measured only in ships, missiles, drones and fighter aircraft. It must also be measured in wars prevented, civilians protected, famine averted and peace processes sustained.

That is why Canada needs a renewed human security foreign policy alongside military renewal.

Human security begins with a simple idea: the safety of states depends on the safety of people. Famine, mass displacement, sexual violence, climate instability and attacks on civilians are not secondary humanitarian concerns — they are central security issues.

Sudan demonstrates the cost of forgetting this lesson. The country's devastating civil war has produced famine, atrocities and mass displacement while outside powers fuel the

conflict through money, arms and proxy interests. It is a stark reminder of what happens when the international community abandons prevention and diplomacy.

Canada once helped lead on these issues through the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, adopted by the United Nations in 2005. Its principle was clear: sovereignty carries responsibilities, and when populations face genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity, the international community has a duty to respond through humanitarian, diplomatic and peaceful means.

Sudan is exactly the kind of crisis this framework was designed to address.

Canada cannot end the conflict alone, nor replace African leadership. But it can help build and support an African-led, Sudanese-owned peace effort. That means appointing a senior envoy, making Sudan a diplomatic priority at the United Nations, supporting women mediators and civil society, pressing for humanitarian access, and demanding accountability for atrocities.

It also means ensuring consistency at home by tightening loopholes in Canada's arms export system.

Canada does not need to choose between defence and peace. But defence spending without a human security purpose will leave Canada less influential, less principled and ultimately less secure.

Sudan is where Canada can show that the Responsibility to Protect still has meaning.