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The Limits of Human Security: Canada in East Timor (PDF)

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Steve Grunau has taken a strong interest in international affairs, with a focus in security and defence issues in Asia, throughout his academic career. This interest is rooted in the years spent growing up in Asian locales such as the Philippines and Indonesia, and were a focal point of his B.A. in Political Science at the University of Calgary, where he received the Silver Medallion for highest achievement upon graduating in 2002. Steve is currently in the process of completing his M.A. at the Norm Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University, and recently began working full-time as a Research Assistant for Senator Douglas Roche.

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ABSTRACT

The Limits of Human
Security: Canada in
East Timor
Steve Grunau

Human security was a dominant theme of Canadian foreign policy during the tenure of Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy, who made it a focal point of Canada's term on the UN Security Council (1999 - 2000). The equality of individuals that is implicit in human security requires that its benefits, not least of which is the right to life free from violence, be extended to all, a doctrine which was expounded by many Western leaders as a new guiding principle in the wake of the NATO intervention in Kosovo. This principle was tested only months later when a UN-administered referendum in East Timor resulted in the overwhelming ratification of independence by voters, followed by a wave of violence perpetrated by anti-independence groups with the support of the Indonesian military.

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The international community demanded that the Indonesian government re-establish order or allow a multinational force to do so, but stopped short of initiating a unilateral intervention on the Kosovo model. Key players such as the United States and Australia had substantial security and economic interests in Indonesia, as did Canada, which followed its allies in waiting until the multinational force was invited into East Timor only after the island's infrastructure had been largely destroyed and a large proportion of its population displaced. When the intervention was authorized, Canadian troops were delayed from entering the theatre by faulty equipment and operational preparations. Although it has been put forward as a key component of Canadian foreign policy, there are clear limits to the role of human security in guiding Canadian decision-makers in practice.

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