

Change a life,  
starting with your own.  
Learn more at [redcross.org](http://redcross.org).



## THE GLOBE AND MAIL

August 7, 2009

### Step up, Canada: Propose a G8 Centre on Fragile States

By Roland Paris and James Ron  
From Monday's Globe and Mail

*Establishing it here would be a shrewd blend of public-spirited investment and self-interested capacity-building at home*

In a few months, when Canada assumes leadership of the G8, we will have a unique opportunity as host and organizer of the 2010 summit to frame the agenda and propose new initiatives.

Why not use this chance to make a real contribution to helping fragile states in the developing world – countries unable to provide basic security and services to their citizens?

Stabilizing these countries, as the World Bank recently acknowledged, is one of the most pressing international security and development challenges. These states are especially prone to slipping into self-reinforcing cycles of internal conflict, economic collapse and humanitarian emergencies that too often destabilize regions. When fragile states collapse, they become inviting havens for transnational criminal and terrorist groups.

Canada could propose a G8 Centre On Fragile States that would bring together the world's leading experts on security, governance and development to find better ways of promoting peace, order and good governance in such countries. Experts would include not just researchers but government officials from G8 countries and the Global South, especially Africa, where most fragile states are located.

Helping fragile states is an immensely complex enterprise that, by definition, requires collaboration across academic disciplines and government departments. Although multidisciplinary research and “whole of government” policy approaches are being pursued in many countries, there is no place where experts and practitioners can come together, learn from past efforts, and develop new approaches based on rigorous analysis and practical experience.

Creating such a centre would not only fill this gap, it would also reflect our values and interests. Canadians' belief in decent, effective government and the rule of law is bred in the bone. We have a long history of finding ways to govern our multiethnic society, and a proud tradition of contributing to international development, peace and security.

Basing the centre here would make Canada a global knowledge leader on an issue of international concern. Others, most notably, the Scandinavians, have used strategic investments to create world-leading policy-research institutes on international issues. Norway, Sweden and Denmark routinely attract the world's best talent to these institutes, not only strengthening these countries' reputations for research excellence but providing top-notch training opportunities for scholars.

Importantly, these institutes have created an immense stock of knowledge on international issues of interest to their host countries in informing their own foreign policies. The strategy, in short, represents a shrewd blend of public-

spirited investment, aimed at making the world a better place, and self-interested capacity-building at home.

If Canada were to pursue this strategy here with a fragile states centre, it could strike a deal with other G8 governments to share costs. Ottawa could cover initial operating expenses, while other G8 governments could pay for their best researchers and officials to spend productive time at the centre. The G8 as a whole could share the costs of bringing in academics and practitioners from the Global South.

But this new centre should not suckle at the government's teat forever. Like any good startup, a knowledge-creation agency should compete internationally for grants, contracts and private funding. If the fragile states centre doesn't attract top talent and produce excellent results, it should shut down. Period. We expect our hockey teams to win gold; that's the kind of attitude we need to bring to public investment in research. For a rich country with strong international commitments, Canada's research capacity on international policy issues is surprisingly thin. We have few foreign affairs institutes known outside the country; many of our best go abroad for excellent training, never to return.

The days of relying on government officials to generate foreign policy ideas are long gone. The Department of Foreign Affairs, once a font of fresh thinking and leadership on international affairs, has been largely reduced to implementing (not generating) policy and running our embassies and consulates.

Establishing a G8 centre on fragile states here would not fix these problems. We would still need to confront the larger challenge of renewing Canada's intellectual and policy leadership in foreign affairs.

But building such a centre would at least be a start in an area where we can make a difference in the world, and garner benefits at home.

*Roland Paris is director of the Centre for International Policy Studies at the University of Ottawa. James Ron is associate professor at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University.*



© Copyright CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc. All Rights Reserved.

. Permission granted for up to 5 copies. All rights reserved.

You may forward this article or get additional permissions by typing [http://license.icopyright.net/3.8425?icx\\_id=/icopyright/?artid=1245355](http://license.icopyright.net/3.8425?icx_id=/icopyright/?artid=1245355) into any web browser. CTVglobemedia Publishing, Inc and Globe and Mail logos are registered trademarks of CTVglobemedia Publishing, Inc . The iCopyright logo is a registered trademark of iCopyright, Inc.