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Book Review ~ Patrick Brown

Making the Global Village Our Turf

Despite 27 years on the Canadian political scene (five as Foreign Minister), it looks as if Lloyd Axworthy's work has barely started. His new book, *Navigating a New World: Canada's Global Future* is the product of the passions of a quintessential Canadian, the aspirations of a world citizen, and the lessons of global experience.

The result is a prescription for Canada's activist involvement in the entire world, driven by a globalized conscience and using skills and attitudes which, says Axworthy, confer a particular advantage on Canadians in assuming what he calls the 'navigation' role. But overhanging the entire book is a visceral distaste for the hegemonic machinations of the current Bush regime in the US, and a fear that US prescriptions, together with a high degree of economic integration (not to mention political ties and overt arm-twisting) will divert Canada's foreign policy from its historically internationalist approach and multilateral inclinations.

Axworthy puts forward a clear and brave alternative to US-influenced foreign policy. His vision of Canadians as responsible world citizens has its roots in the 'social justice' movement. But Axworthy is no fundamentalist, rather a pragmatist with a coherent moral compass.

A Man from Winnipeg

Lloyd Axworthy describes himself as a 'small-l' liberal, but leaves the reader to figure out what that means. Inspired as a teenager by Lester Pearson, he studied political science at United College, Winnipeg (later the University of Winnipeg), and at Princeton, which awarded him a PhD in 1972.

He admits to a certain fascination with US politics, but makes it clear, '...we are not Americans. We have our own destiny to fulfill.'

He credits John F Kennedy and Pierre Trudeau, in whose cabinet he served, as later influences. His experience as foreign minister, clearly a dream job, gave him a '...constant surge of adrenalin...'

Now 63 and Director of UBC's Liu Institute for Global Affairs, he sets a challenge for Canadians to follow in his footsteps.

Human Security and National Sovereignty

The lodestar of Axworthy's life as an internationalist is 'human security,' freedom from fear and violations of body and spirit. He envisions this as neither a US 'laissez faire' or a European 'dirigiste' model. But his view of security is broad, and includes economic, physical, and environmental aspects.

Viewing a world, and its international institutions, organized around the concept of the 'nation-state,' Axworthy argues that if any nation does not have both the willingness and the ability to protect its own people, it has no right to undisturbed sovereignty. In his view, the international community has the right, and in fact the duty, to intervene.

He cites plenty of examples, some in which there was successful intervention, some where it was botched, or just avoided: Kosovo, Rwanda, Zaire, Srebrenica, Sierra Leone, East Timor, Chechnya, Peru, Liberia. What is important, he says, is for the world to assure all humans that they matter.

Soft Power

Not for Axworthy the carefully structured world of formal diplomacy and international relations, the scripted jousting, standoffs, and sometimes war between nations. He's an advocate of 'soft power,' the interaction of '...people working in a global network'—a strategy based on information, communication and persuasion. In particular, it's an alternative to current US 'full spectrum dominance' policies and pre-emptive, unilateral action.

Axworthy's spectrum includes not only traditional diplomatic channels, but also a wide variety of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), regional country groups, civil society and international humanitarian organizations, intergovernmental agencies, multinational corporations, the Commonwealth, the Organization of American States (OAS), the WTO, Africa's NEPAD, la Francophonie, NATO, the Group of 20, the Arctic Council, and a bewildering array of networks and personal contacts.

And, of course, the widespread panoply of the United Nations. Axworthy is the first to admit that the UN is less than perfect, but nevertheless firmly believes that it is essential.

He also clearly believes that individuals, particularly Canadians, can make a difference.

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Island Tides, Box 55, Pender Island, BC, Canada.

Phone: 250-629-3660. Fax: 250-629-3838.

Email: islandtides@islandtides.com.

Website: <http://www.islandtides.com>

Some Examples of Soft Power

His book describes two accomplishments of which he is obviously proud: the international treaty on anti-personnel land mines (the 'Ottawa process'), and the creation of the International Criminal Court. Both of these were new, innovative, and could be said to be victories of Canadian 'soft power', and templates for future international agreements.

The Ottawa process, in particular, involved many civil society players, and Axworthy was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for it. The International Criminal Court, set up to try people rather than nations, has its intellectual and political home in Canada, and the US is still attempting to undermine it. But, as Axworthy says, '...impunity for the powerful is no longer assured...'

Critics of 'soft power' point out how ineffective it can be when dealing with defiant states and stubborn individuals. This is undoubtedly valid—ask Maher Arar—but you can't play hardball all the time, either.

Issues

Axworthy's litany of the world's problems emphasizes those threats to human security which would inspire moral outrage in most of us. They are almost too numerous to list: AIDS and maternal mortality, which account for millions of deaths, particularly in Africa, the corruption and ineptitude of failed states, poverty, drought, and starvation, children's wars and the oversupply of automatic weapons, nuclear sabre-rattling, outer space weaponization, and the '...crazy logic of the pre-emptive use of weapons of mass destruction to take out presumed weapons of mass destruction...'

On Kyoto, which he supports: 'International governance on environmental issues is notoriously weak.' On the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the failures of the Washington Consensus, he cites a widespread fear of international financial institutions which take away the right of democratic governments to make decisions. There's a need, he says, to '...break the hold of the international market priesthood.'

But he reminds us that 'Concerns about globalization are as much about culture as they are about economics.'

Meanwhile, he accuses the international community of remaining in 'reactive mode,' failing to take responsibility, and being dominated by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

The United Nations

With his emphasis on the security of humans, rather than nations, Axworthy reminds us that the first words of the UN Charter are 'We the peoples of the United Nations.' An effective UN, he says, is clearly in the interests of Canada.

Unfortunately, he notes, the UN structure still represents the relationships of the great powers at the end of World War Two. This is particularly true of the Security Council.

He proposes a change in emphasis: the basic purpose should be the responsibility to protect individuals, rather than nations; the General Assembly should take on more of a decisionmaking role; the UN needs a rapid reaction force that can quickly reach the world's trouble spots; finally, why not a 'peoples' general assembly,' in addition to the present one, which represents national governments?

The Threat from the US

The undercurrent which runs through this book is Axworthy's concern about pressure on Canada to become a compliant satellite of the US which, he says, has little regard for Canadian interests and principles. He describes the Canadian relationship to the US as making love to a porcupine (Trudeau described it as sleeping with an elephant).

While he advocates more Canadian government offices in the US, he is concerned that the US War on Terrorism has resulted in '...pressures from both within and without to sign on to an anti-terrorist doctrine that will fundamentally reorient our own foreign policy.' (This book was started just before 9/11 and completed a few months ago.) We should avoid, he says, 'one on one' relationships with the US. Not always easy.

As an example, Axworthy says that the price of Canada's refusal to become involved in the Iraq war is our capitulation on continental missile defence. As for our foreign policy: '...do we simply leave it to the market or Uncle Sam to decide?'

At times, cold fury: '...not since the coldest days of the Cold War has there been such outright disavowal of the validity of multilateral engagement, such willingness to break agreements and the adoption of such aggressive pro-nuclear policies as there is under George W. Bush.'

And at home: '...some editorialist, academic or Alliance spokesman or defence minister bleats out that we have no choice but to fall in lockstep with American policies.'

An Actor on the International Stage

'Canada can and should be one of the mapmakers in today's highly charged international environment.' says Axworthy. 'We possess qualities suitable to this role, '...because of the distinctive qualities of our political, social, and economic system.' Our international stance should mirror basic domestic values.

We have a little preparation to do. We should: adopt a proportional representation system for electing the federal parliament; elect the senate, and maybe some of our key international representatives; limit the power of money in Canadian elections; make greater use of the Internet for transparency, and accountability.

Axworthy would raise our international involvement to a top level national priority and create a cabinet level global strategy team, using civilians and our immigrant diaspora communities internationally.

'But another choice that Canadians should be given is to take on leadership, become the active agent for change, forge

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alliances, and dedicate time, effort and resources to generating support.'

Does Canada have the political will?

Axworthy's Vision

Axworthy's combination of passion and responsibility is rare in politics. His breadth of view adds extra credibility. Indifference, he says, is the ultimate sin.

His adoption of global citizenship should make us think. How many Canadians can share his excitement at the challenge: 'Exploration is not for the entrenched, the comfortable, the defenders of the status quo....'

Axworthy measures the future in terms of a world of two Emmas: one Emma is a child soldier in Uganda, the other, his new grandchild in Toronto. They are presented with a world of difficulties, inhumanities, and contradictions. What will they grow up to?

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By the end of the book, we well understand what Axworthy thinks a liberal is: a modest, polite Canadian with energy and enthusiasm to work anywhere, anytime, for human security. A person of strong humanitarian principles with a devotion to social justice, and to a balance between economics and the environment. Someone who feels responsibility and duty. Someone who would rather work by persuasion, consensus, communication, and contact than by force or intimidation. A team builder and leader. Finally, a fierce pride in Canada, and a belief that Canadians are true citizens of the world.

And someone who enthusiastically accepts the challenge to '...make the [global] village our turf.' Lloyd Axworthy is that type of Canadian.

*'Navigating A New World: Canada's Global Future.'*Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2003. \$37.95 Can. ✍

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