Reclaiming Choice in the Context of Globalization: Transnational Strategies for the Promotion of Rights and Justice

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David R. Black (Dalhousie University)
W. Andy Knight (University of Alberta)
Claire Turenne Sjolander (University of Ottawa)
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Canadian peacekeepers and NGOs assisting people in trouble both at home and abroad. Canadians leading the international charge in support of a ban on anti-personnel mines. Canada's pro-active engagement in the Commonwealth and the Francophonie. United Nations' surveys identifying Canada as the "best place in the world" to live. These are the images of a tolerant, compassionate, and especially, of a committed Canada. Lloyd Axworthy put it most starkly when he stated that "Canada has no choice – in view of its independence, its qualities and its history – but to make a commitment...."[1] Commitment to the world seems to be Canada's destiny, whether we like it or not. However, despite Axworthy's claim that Canada has no choice (whatever the reason for the commitment), the very idea of commitment implies just such a choice. Commitment requires a political decision to intervene in the international environment in a particular way, and a decision about which issues can, should, and do become the subject of debate. In the absence of a formulation, such intervention – Canada's commitment – would take place in aid of a normatively preferable global order, marked by enhanced prospects for justice and security.

Over the past two decades, however, the imagined range of such interventions has become both more focused and less hopeful. The restructuring of the global order, marked by economic globalization and the end of the Cold War, has created its own imperatives. "In this day and age, no government – especially Canada's – can ignore the consequences of globalization," as Axworthy has signaled. Indeed, if Canada has no choice but to make a commitment, it is "because it is on this commitment that its very survival will depend."[2]

What then can be the manifestations of commitment in an era defined by economic globalization? Economic restructuring brings with it, in a very real sense, a new perception of the constraints on political action. In responding to a post-World War II political project of economic liberalization, economic globalization has pushed forward that agenda into the terrain of the "inevitable." Particularly since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, globalization has taken on the aura of the inescapable. States appear to be increasingly relegated to the role of facilitators,

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[1] Lloyd Axworthy, Minister of Foreign Affairs, "Between globalization and multipolarity: the case for a global, humane Canadian foreign policy." http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/english/foreign/humane.htm.

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