



Address by the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the National Forum on Canada's International Relations, Winnipeg, December 13, 1996

A Changing World

You may have seen reports out of Serbia recently about how, when the government closed down the last independent radio station, Serbians turned to the Internet. By setting up their own web site, the people of Serbia were able to exchange information on the massive demonstrations protesting the overturning by the Serbian government of legitimate local election results. They were able to network and organize. The government could turn off a single radio transmitter - but it could not reach the thousands of computers linking individual citizens to the world.

What has been happening in Serbia, and elsewhere in the former Yugoslavia, is a sign of broader changes. In recent years, the world has experienced a profound geopolitical shift. The tectonic plates of international relations have realigned themselves and, as always when two plates meet, huge forces have been unleashed. A new landscape is becoming visible, but the aftershocks of these movements are still going on, in the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere. New countries are taking shape, and peoples are making their voices heard in the world in a way they could not before.

Trends Driving Change

The Internet, and more generally a revolution in information technology, are acting as levellers. By harnessing this new technology, people have as

much of a hand as governments in driving events. What we are seeing is the democratization of international relations and of foreign policy.

The events in Serbia have been front-page news in Canada. Reports of the demonstrations fill Canadian television and computer screens. This permeability of borders and heightened interdependence characterize the new era. They challenge us to rethink Canada's place in the world, and how we respond to outside events.

During the Cold War, when Canada acted to preserve peace and security internationally, it was within clear limits and constraints. We sent peacekeepers; we negotiated disarmament treaties. And we generally stayed away from what were seen as the internal affairs of other countries. Now security has become something much broader. An annulled election in Serbia, or ethnic hatred in Bosnia, Rwanda or Zaire, can act as the trigger for conflict that destabilizes whole regions. It is increasingly clear that preserving "human security" - human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, good governance, sustainable development and social equity - is as important to global peace as arms control and disarmament. It is in response to the need to preserve human security that the notion of peacebuilding has emerged.

I picked Serbia as an example because I think it brings home to us the trends behind the tectonic shift in international relations that we have witnessed:

- democratization and the multiplication of international actors;