

There has been a proliferation of TV channels, including all-news channels, thirsty for information. There has also been sudden access to many regions previously closed by the Cold War. In its wake has come a surge of nationalist and tribal violence, providing an unlimited supply of suffering humanity.

Television deals best with people, not ideas. The human consequences of the Cold War were often hidden from view. They were an abstraction, the stuff of talk in television studios, and often nothing more exciting visually than the comings and goings of officials in conference.

Distinguished officials of External Affairs may have found such pictures quite stimulating, but they did not have to sell soap—or, since we are in the territory of Sam Slick, soft sawder. By territory, I mean Nova Scotia, not External Affairs.

Now, violations of human rights from many causes are manifest to the cameras, and the cameras, understandably, lap it up, arousing the pity and indignation of audiences at home. I don't think there has ever been anything like it before.

Also emerging from the Cold War has been a United Nations eager to fulfil ambitions long frustrated by the divided Security Council, to intervene to keep the peace and to alleviate suffering. Further, the only surviving superpower, the United States, has begun to appreciate the virtues of multilateralism, which less powerful nations like Canada had preached for years—to empty pews south of the border.

Yet the instinct to intervene clashed with other realities: a global recession, which sapped revenues, increased unemployment and aggravated the painful industrial restructuring caused by the same electronic revolution that drives the new information order. These realities produced a counter-trend, an urgent political need to repair and convert economies distorted by the Cold War.

A heady mixture, all these trends: a proliferation of peacekeeping and peacemaking initiatives running into budget and social deficits, and a rising clamor from new isolationists. Governments were battered simultaneously by calls to do something, do everything, do nothing.

To John Ruggie, Dean of Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, the new situation led the media to "want a more humanitarian foreign policy ... a foreign policy beyond the national interest."

Peter Rodman of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies said there is a danger that "our moral impulse will outreach our strategic sense."