



THE GROUP OF 78  
LE GROUPE DES 78

# **Sovereignty and the Interdependence of Nations: Implications for Canada**

**Group of 78 Annual Policy Conference 2004**

**Background Material**

**The Limits of State Sovereignty and the  
Interdependence of Nations:  
Implications for Canada's National Policy**

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**Conference Chair: Peggy Mason**

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In March 2003 the United States, with the support of Great Britain, attacked Iraq and has now occupied the country for over a year. Prior to the attack the US appealed to the United Nations Security Council to support the disarming of Iraq through the use of military force. When this diplomatic effort failed, and despite alternative proposals advanced by Canada and other nations, the US declared the UN irrelevant. In words spoken by President Bush: *When it comes to our security, if we need to act, we will act. And we really don't need the United Nations approval to do so.* At the time there was also unmistakable evidence that the US attack on Iraq was opposed by an overwhelming majority of the world's people.

A central argument in the US action was the elimination of Iraq's weapons of

mass destruction, an allegation which has subsequently proved to be without foundation. Today, over a year after organized resistance was declared ended, Iraqi resistance to the occupation has become increasingly violent, casualties are mounting, and a clear majority of the Iraqi people are opposed to the American occupation. In apparent desperation, the US is now appealing to the international community to rescue it from an increasingly probable defeat in its self proclaimed efforts to establish a free and democratic Iraq, with serious political and economic consequences for not only the US but the entire world community.

The cost of the unilateral American decision to invade Iraq has inflicted a high price in human casualties, has created increased instability in the region, and can be expected to have serious economic consequences, in part from a US deficit expected to exceed \$500 billion. Particularly troubling, the US decision to invade Iraq may lead to a strengthening of the forces of international terrorism.

Hopefully, the 2003 Iraq war may over time prove to be a world threshold event which will demonstrate the limits of state sovereignty, including the limits of the world's only superpower. History may then have turned a corner when all forms of state unilateral action, without the approved legitimacy which only the world community of nations can provide, will no longer be acceptable.

International terrorism is clearly only one of several immediate or impending threats to human civilization in today's world. A brief summary of six others follow:

### **Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons**

The world has been fortunate to escape the use of nuclear weapons in war since their first use in Hiroshima and Nagasaki almost 60 years ago. But despite important measures to reduce their future use, particularly the test ban and non proliferation treaties, there is growing concern, particularly in the US since 9/11, that a terrorist or rogue state nuclear attack could occur without warning. There can be no doubt that the spread of nuclear weapons to additional nations increases the risk. Nothing less than their total elimination, based upon a comprehensive verification system, will provide the nations of the world with an acceptable level of security from a nuclear attack. The control and eventual elimination of nuclear weapons, under the authority of an agency of the UN established for the purpose, is clearly a global imperative, and beyond the jurisdiction of the nation state or any coalition of nation states.

### **Population Growth**

During the 20th century the growth in human population of the planet came close to quadrupling, a rate of growth unprecedented in human history. Today there is persuasive evidence that the present 6.3 billion people (and increasing at

over 200,000 a day) exceeds the carrying capacity of the planet if all were provided with the present economic standards of the industrial world. About 2 billion people subsist on US\$2 a day or less and, based upon most reports, the gap between the poor and the rich continues to widen. While some countries have recently made significant progress in limiting their population growth rates, little or no change has occurred in most of South Asia and much of Africa.

### **Resource Consumption**

The rate of consumption of several essential resources is clearly unsustainable over time. There is one resource, however, which threatens to seriously destabilize the world economy within a decade or two: the rapid depletion of oil. It has been petroleum more than any other one resource which has made possible the estimated 50 fold increase in the world economy during the 20th century (and in turn the near quadrupling in human numbers). Oil production in the US peaked in 1970, peak production in non OPEC countries is expected to occur before 2010, and the peak in world production is expected before 2020. Present efforts to replace oil with other energy sources, at competitive prices, are completely inadequate, even though there is considerable evidence that the goal is feasible. Today oil provides 90% of the energy for all forms of transportation, and is an essential resource in the production of food. The energy threat to human civilization is real and urgent.

### **Climate Change**

Meteorological reports indicate that the 16 warmest years on record have all occurred since 1980, and the three warmest years on record have occurred in the last five years. Not only is the earth's average temperature becoming warmer but the warming trend appears to be accelerating. Based upon reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, there is a clear relationship between global warming and an increase in the concentration of greenhouse gases (principally carbon dioxide) in the atmosphere resulting primarily from the burning of fossil fuels. Carbon dioxide levels are now approaching 50% above their pre industrial levels, and are said to be at their highest concentration in 420,000 years. The world community's first effort to address this global problem, the Kyoto Protocol, is stalled by US intransigence. Both scientific studies and recent news reports provide evidence that if recent global warming trends continue, humankind can expect more frequent droughts, more severe storms, rising ocean levels, and extreme heat waves.

### **World Food Production**

The World Policy Institute reported earlier this month that in each of the last four years world grain production has been below consumption and world grain stocks are at their lowest levels in 30 years. World grain production per capita peaked in 1984 and is now about 13% below the level it was 20 years ago. The principal reasons for this downward trend appear to be population growth, a loss

of agricultural land through invading deserts and soil erosion, aquifer depletion, and severe heat waves and drought. It may well be that this trend can be reversed but success may require considerable progress in further reducing population growth, and greatly reduce our present reliance on fossil fuels. A major concern is that an increasing number of nations are now dependent on food imports, particularly in the Middle East and parts of Africa. Should present global food trends continue, our ability to aid those countries and regions which may experience sudden and severe food shortages could become increasingly precarious.

### **Failed States and Natural Disasters**

During very recent years the world has experienced several humanitarian crises involving suffering and loss of life on a scale which is difficult to imagine. Genocide, or a form of genocide, has occurred in Cambodia and Rwanda and, to a lesser extent, in Kosovo and East Timor. Natural disasters, perhaps influenced by climate change, are becoming increasingly frequent. And the AIDS pandemic is ravaging Africa and is threatening other areas with a loss of life in the millions. How should the world respond to these horrific human disasters? Does the world not have a responsibility to take appropriate preventive measures, or, when time does not allow, intervene in the crisis area, including the use of armed force? In 2001 the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty released its Report entitled the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Much discussion and debate has followed, ranging from a moral imperative for the world community to act to reservations related to state intervention, anti-terrorism and the use of military force.

### **The Interdependent Imperative**

The above major problem areas (by no means a complete list) have several characteristics in common:

- a) Each has a global dimension beyond the reach of the nation state.
- b) The global character of each major problem area implies the need for global solutions.
- c) Nation state corrective measures, if applied unilaterally, are of limited or no value (population growth possibly excepted).
- d) Each is interconnected with one or more other world problem areas, and action applied to one has an impact on one or more of the others.

The above reviewed problem areas, plus several others, describe a complex of world problems - a global macro-problem - unique in world history. The world community's response during the 21st century may well be decisive, not only for human civilization but the planetary ecosystem as it has evolved over eons of time.

No nation state acting unilaterally, including the US, possesses the competence,

the jurisdictional legitimacy, or the economic capacity to provide an adequate and effective response to the multidimensional challenge to the future of human civilization. Nation states can of course do much to solve particular problems within their own borders, and provide bilateral assistance and mutual support to one another (like provinces within a state). But when the larger dimensions of each problem are considered, and particularly when viewed from the perspective of the totality of the threat to humankind, nations must be governed by a relationship of interdependence.\* Progress in meeting this challenge requires that each nation be provided with a full opportunity to participate in the search for solutions, as well as decision making implementation.

Among our difficulties is a natural human tendency to focus on a single world problem which the mind can more easily grasp, and a reluctance to address several interconnected problems simultaneously. A mix of problems, even if related, necessarily imply greater complexity in both comprehension and determining solutions. Hence we have Civil Society organizations which place their main emphasis on a single world problem or closely related problems, for example organizations that focus on economic development, or international security, or human rights, or population, or the environment, or political institutions and governance, etc. Since the challenge facing the world community in the 21st century is multidimensional, it is not appropriate to address a particular threat in isolation from the totality of the web of interdependent threats to planet earth and its human inhabitants. A holistic approach must therefore be applied to both understanding the threat and developing solutions.

Should uncertainty exist in determining the parameters of nation state vs. world community responsibility, it is useful to apply the principle of subsidiarity. This principle can be defined as: *Each function should be carried out at the closest possible level to the people affected and at the lowest level consistent with the efficient performance of the task.*

Finally, to provide additional perspective to the above discussion it may be useful to recall the words of Dr. Sylvia Ostry spoken in an address on Global Governance and International Trade at the University of Ottawa in June 1997.

*The last great historical amalgamation was the amalgamation of small regions into nation states. We have all studied the process as it happened in Europe: how Bretagne, Provence, Alsace Lorraine and others became France, how Cataluna, Aragon, Galicia, and the Basque became Spain. How it took longer to unite the hundreds of duchies, principalities and whatever into Germany, and so on. The process was then exported to other areas of the world, some of which became nations in self-defence, others of which did not become nations politically until freed from colonialism.*

*In each situation there is a loss of sovereignty, and homogenization.*

*It is impossible to imagine a modern country existing with 18th century economics. The 13 American colonies, before unification, had separate currencies, separate legal weights and measures, and separate governments. The new methods of communications, the canals, and eventually the telegraph and railroads, made it possible for countries like the US and Canada to exist.*

*I am convinced that we are in the throes of a third wave of amalgamation, working toward a world wide unity. The first wave began with the invention of agriculture and ended the hunting and gathering way of life, and brought about the first cities, and the resulting city-states and empires. The second big wave was the aforementioned creation of modern nations, and may not even be complete in some areas like the Pacific Islands or Africa. Now the regulation of multinational corporations, international commerce, trade between national entities and global travel demands supranational structures. We have already created them, and like every bureaucracy, they take on a life of their own*

### **Suggestions for a Group of 78 Action Program**

- Draft a Declaration of The Interdependence of Nations.
- Establish a Civil Society Network of organizations and individuals that support the Declaration.
- Communicate to the government of Canada a proposal that the Declaration should be accepted as a cornerstone of Canada's national policy.

\* It is interesting to note from reading the present government's 2004 Speech from the Throne that the word "interdependence" or "interdependent" was used no less than six times in the two page coverage of Canada's Role in the World.