NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS

BY

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LIBERALS AT THE BORDER: WE STAND ON GUARD FOR WHOM?

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Six months ago today, terrorists attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Shock waves from that assault are still reverberating in most corners of the world. The hijacked planes, turned into fiery projectiles by a fanatic’s creed, destroyed more than precious lives… collapsed more than structures made of concrete and steel. They shook the foundations of many hallowed beliefs, undermined accepted wisdoms, and shattered accustomed ways of thinking and acting.

Canadians responded with sympathy and understanding to the tragedy of our southern neighbour. We shared their deep revulsion at the remorseless killing of innocent people and our government has shown unequivocal support for US retaliatory actions. The national agenda has been consumed with preoccupations of border management, and anti-terrorist measures that serve to demonstrate solidarity in the war against the new barbarians.

Increasingly, however, the immediate and necessary responses to the September 11th have been swept along in a whirlwind of decisions and a cascade of military and diplomatic initiatives by the United States that substantially change the global landscape. Security has become the all-powerful mantra, driving out most other concerns. The declared war on terrorism obscures the deadly toll of one half million casualties a year, mainly civilians, due to civil conflict. Prospects of expanded military action threaten division in the global community. Force, not resolution, is too often the arbiter of disputes.

Eight months before the terrorist attack, the coming to power of a new presidency changed the political coordinates in Washington from center to right. The advisors to President Bush, old pros from previous Republican regimes, have seized on the call to arms on terrorism to assert an agenda that sees the world organized around an American hub, based on military dominance, with little regard for international treaties, agreements or institutions. At first, it seemed that a coalition-based collaboration might prevail, but the signs of that grow dim. The current buzzword in Washington is “maximum spectrum dominance.” Just a trifle chilling if you think about it!

This double punch combination of a breach in continental security followed by an American administration steeped in aggressive unilateralism is a major migraine for Canada. Managing the relationship was challenging enough when the Clinton White House shared broad support for international architecture. It is far more daunting when it is occupied by a wrecking crew dedicated to the dismantling of that architecture, riding the wave of a crusade against an axis of evil.

Pierre de Tielhard Chardin, the Jesuit theologian has written: “There are a great many portents, political and social upheavals, religious unease that have caused us all to feel that something tremendous is taking place in the world. But what is it?”

That is a question that many now ask or at least should ask. One half year after that stunning event of September 11th the time has come to take stock, to look hard at what
has transpired and to consider whether the unfolding trend of events is to our liking, suits our values or represents the kind of choices we should be making in line with the special political, economic, social and cultural DNA that Canadians have “bred in our bones,” to use Robertson Davies felicitous and unscientific phrase.

The question of “what is it” that we presently experience is the subject that I propose for this year’s rendition of the Davey Lecture, and maybe even a little look at “what do we do about it.”

For that reason, I thank the stewards of Victoria College and Dorothy Davey for the invitation to join this distinguished gathering. It is an opportunity to pay personal homage to a man that shaped in no small way my own entry and apprenticeship into the world of politics and who during his remarkable public career gave shape to one of the enduring anchors of Canadian political life – the Liberal Party of Canada. We in this country are not very good at acknowledging our political builders and engineers, almost embarrassed to admit they exist. So, it is a welcome opportunity to have this chance to say thanks to the Senator.

And I can think of no more fitting and appropriate way, in his presence to show appreciation than to engage in an open discussion and public debate about the defining decisions that Canadian liberals, especially those who are members of the large L-Liberal variety must make as this country stands on the border of an important fault line in our national life.

It may be a little discordant in the eyes of some to focus so specifically on what might appear as a partisan subject in these hallowed academic halls. And, I must confess that even after a year of strenuous efforts by my academic colleagues at UBC to rehabilitate me from my past pursuits, I can’t help reverting to form, especially in the company of so many past partners in crime. But, there is a more to this exercise than old habits re-asserting themselves. There is an undeniable good reason for addressing the issue of where liberals stand at this time in our history; where they stand will determine in no small measure what decisions will occur.

In that respect, we should take lessons from Senator Davey. No one relished more the practice and pragmatics of party politics than Keith. As long time director of the party, he was truly a happy warrior in mastering the intricacies of democratic electoral politics. But, always for a reason. For Keith the game had a goal – it was the promotion of Canada.

He has always been passionate about this country and a great believer in its destiny. And no one believes more fervently in the crucial role that democratic party politics plays (in his case Liberal Party politics) in defining through open and active debate a role for Canada. The party was not just a machine, but a forum where differences were heard and agreements hammered out.
My brother Tom and I were reminiscing a few weeks ago about the time in the mid-sixties, I just back from graduate school, Tom an under graduate at United College in Winnipeg when we were visited by the Senator, only then he was known as the Rainmaker. Unusual for someone from Toronto to seek out Western Liberals, especially snot-nosed, wet behind the ears Western Liberals. At a time when Walter Gordon and Mitchell Sharp led differing forces in the Party over the issue of foreign ownership – then the defining issue of our relations with the US – he appealed to us to become engaged in the unfolding debate.

We did. And, we will never forget the packed ballroom of the Chateau Laurier, with long lines of the party heavy weights, the rank and file, the young liberals behind the mikes, debating with fervour long into the night because we instinctively knew that something momentous was taking place, that this was one more station on the road to economic integration that was being fought out by the party. Note that it was the party that had the debate.

The same crossroads was met in 1988 when another generation of liberals had to decide on the crucial issue of free trade. Once again we were faced with the hard choices between the economic realities of cross border trade and all its benefits with the nagging sense that each step down the path of integration would lead to a diminishing of our freedom to choose and our range of maneuver. The early nineties brought a renewal of the same issue as we wrestled with the Tory legacy of the NAFTA agreement.

Plus ca change plus c’est la meme chose.

The border has thus been a defining, central issue for liberals as long as I can remember, and through liberals a defining issue for the country. Always in play was the difficult calculation of how to derive the benefits of sharing North America with one of the world’s powerhouses, yet managing to coexist with political and economic space we could call our own.

Never an easy balancing act, but one that was seen by a majority of liberals over the year’s as worth doing. The Pearson stand against the Vietnam war, the Trudeau mission on nuclear arms, the Turner campaign on free trade and the Chretien opening to Cuba, all illustrations of how different liberal leaders at different times gave Canada a distinctive voice.

A few years back while visiting President Kuchma of Ukraine, I asked how we could help them in their newfound independence. He said send me someone from Canada who can tell us how to live next door to a giant without being eaten. This capacity to keep out of the clutches of a 600-pound gorilla was in the eyes of President Kuchma a distinctly Canadian skill

Is it still? Would the same question be asked to day? Since September 11th new realities are altering our position so that even if the question was asked, we might have a hard time answering. US backlash to security leaks, potentially leading to hiccups and
harassment at the border, has become the source of nervousness in boardrooms and around cabinet tables, underlining the tough truth that our continental interdependence is not cost free.

We all know the profound impact integration has on our economic life. The latest sign is the way that recent takeovers by American firms in vital sectors such as oil and gas and finance are raising fears of a hollowing out in our business centres across the land. The latest panacea is to have a common currency. These are difficult issues that must be faced.

Now it is layered with a security blanket that imposes a whole new set of demands for compliance and accommodation. Changes to refugee and immigration law, severe limitations of rights in our justice system, a push to make us more integrated in military matters, and the muting of any comment that the US administration might construe as criticism are reflections of our political correctness.

Some have argued that this is tactical and short term, simply a realization that the emotion of the times calls for prudence and probity. But, if each tactical step results in a further shaving of the core capacity of Canadians to exercise their freedom of choice, then we have given away too much latitude, compromised too many positions, finding ourselves someday like a Newfoundland lobster, boiled to death by degrees.

The security issue has given added zeal to those in the country who have long lamented that Canada wasn’t nearly as compliant to the dictates of Senator Helms or the Pentagon as they believe any right thinking country should be. They play the “don’t poke them in the eye game” which translated means don’t stand up for Canadian business when there is extra-territorial legislation preventing trade. Or don’t sponsor a land mines treaty or an international court because the US generals don’t like it. Or don’t push for a plan to limit the use of child soldiers or call for a nuclear review in NATO, or engage in human rights at the UN or expanding our peace keeping, peace building capacity because it doesn’t fit with anti-internationalist stance of the present administration. They have become the J. Alfred Prufrock’s of this country who ask: “Do I dare to eat a peach? Do I dare disturb the universe” if some American in high office objects?

Unfortunately the Right has seized on the security issue to assert their own ideological agenda, and too often go unchallenged by liberals. In some extreme cases having their positions adopted by liberals.

Let me point to two recent initiatives. First, was sending troops to Afghanistan to be part of US units mopping up the caves, searching for Bin laden and securing the airport. Nothing intrinsically wrong in our being part of a military effort to destroy the al-Quaeda network – our troops are acquitting themselves in good professional fashion.

But, the imbroglio that ensued when we found that Canadian commitments to international law were not shared by the Americans and we had to engage in fancy footwork to explain away, if we ever did, our complicity should give pause to all those
who believe that robust action as part of an American force should be our way of the
future.

What I regret is the opportunity lost to burnish our standing as peacemakers working
under UN mandate to help in the restoration of peace, order and good government for the
people of Afghanistan.

I was in the region in November, visiting the camps, talking to Afghan volunteers, trying
to arouse support for the humanitarian tragedy that was taking place. There was a
heartfelt cry for help, not for more combat soldiers but for builders and peacekeepers.
There was a chance for Canada to have taken a lead in helping to define the nature and
role of an international presence, to use our scarce resources not as fungible for US
military capacity, of which there is more than enough, but to be there as a major player in
the post-war reconstruction in a country which today is verging on anarchy.

An opportunity lost to exercise a vocation long cherished by Canadians to be
peacemakers, but one that we seem increasingly reluctant to fulfill. At a recent meeting I
attended a veteran Canadian public servant, now serving in an international office,
lamented that we no longer are seen as being engaged with the UN on vital issues of
nation-building – our ranking as a peacekeeper is now number twenty four. We are
remitting our international political currency.

The second alarm is the present negotiations on joining a new US command for heartland
defense in North America. In my mind this is one of the most crucial decisions that
Canadians of this generation will make with far reaching consequences for future
generations. Bland assurances have been issued that this is nothing to get excited about.
Why shouldn’t we integrate say some, after all there is a threat to North America, we
should all do our part.

I readily agree we should do our part, but at what price, for what reason, and in what
way?

Before proceeding too far down this road some important questions must be asked, and
more importantly answered. Let’s start by determining if the threat of terrorism is best
met through military means, behind a fortress wall? Or is it better met by an active effort
to link together a global network that will supply intelligence, police power, and
detection of threat at source, working collaboratively with a wide variety of nations,
NGO’s, and private corporations to mitigate the terrorist threat.

In 1997, I first raised global terrorism at the meeting of the Human Rights Commission of
the UN pointing out that it represented a prime criminal threat to the security of
individuals that would require a major undertaking of multi-lateral cooperation and
dedication of real resources. We had some success in getting international treaties passed.
But, we could never enlist broad based interest, even had trouble getting ratification of
these principles in Canada. In fact the “don’t poke them in the eye” school of thought in
Canada derided these efforts saying that human security- the threat to individuals was not
a problem. The idea of focusing protection on people rather than on nations, of changing the international system towards criminal threats not military aggression, of working towards multilateral cooperation, not relying just on individual defences did not fit their world view of realpolitik.

Michael Howard the Oxford historian has written in the latest Foreign Affairs journal: “To use or misuse the term war is not simply a matter of legality or pedantic semantics. It has deeper and more dangerous consequences,” creating a war psychosis that may totally be counter productive, arousing immediate expectations and demand for spectacular military action. He then points out that: “The use of force is seen no longer as a last resort, to be avoided if humanely possible, but as the first resort and the sooner the better.” Shouldn’t we at least return to the concept of terrorism as a criminal act, and apply the tools of criminal justice on a worldwide basis to restrain and control it, instead of retreating into a fortress?

Consider as well what complications would arise from a merger of our armed forces under a US command on all the various international undertakings we are party to, that the US has not adopted – land mines, Geneva conventions, child soldiers, international court. We have been a leader in forging international laws that hold nations and individuals accountable under law. How do you have a unified command with different troops following different rules? What do we do about the protocols to the Geneva Convention that limits the use of certain weapons? Canada has signed these protocols and the US has not. Under unified command whose rules prevail? What does a Canadian soldier do if asked to handle land mines on Canadian soil, in contravention of our treaty undertakings? What if we apprehend someone considered a war criminal under the soon to be established International Criminal Court. US law would prevent them being turned over to the world body, while our obligations require it. Do you really think the Americans have the patience for exercising a dual system?

To thicken the quagmire, Canadians could find themselves foreclosed in making future policy choices. What can we say other than “ready aye ready” on missile defense schemes if we are part of an integrated homeland security system. And if we can’t say no to missile defense can we say no the next step, which is a space based weapons system? As The Globe and Mail revealed last week, our military planners are already working in close cooperation with their US counterparts on military space research, even though it potentially contradicts our stated policy, and consumes substantial resources that might better go to equipping out troops for mobile peacemaking missions. And if we can’t say no these cherished US ambitions, then do we simply abdicate a role or responsibility to pursue effective arms control architecture?

What is our position in defending and promoting an international, Canadian made regime for the Arctic under a North American Homeland Command? The United States doesn’t accept our sovereignty in that region, nor do they accept the need for any form of international rule making. They have strategic interests there, so the rules be damned. Pretty hard for us to assert our rights if we are in the same ship, or under an US commander. So, as our northern environment experiences substantial change due to the
melting of the ice and the impact of climate change, we are in danger of relinquishing the ability and foregoing the responsibility to shape its future and determine its potential. Surely our northern people need to be involved before any further decisions are made?

Let me put this question to you. Why would we transfer the use of force – the central ingredient in a nation’s responsibility to protect itself – to another state, especially one that by its own admission doesn’t wish to abide by the same rules of international law and conduct that we believe are essential for an orderly world? In the past we have delegated certain sovereign rights under multilateral auspices in the UN or NATO for peacekeeping or humanitarian purposes – we do so with the right to fully participate in a shared decision-making. Why delegate to another country that explicitly doesn’t agree to delegate any of its own authority or to give much space for others to decide? Put it to the test, ask the US if under the proposed new homeland command they are prepared to accept a rotating head commander, with equal turns between Canadian and American generals. You and I know what the answer would be.

It is time to wake up and recognize that each step towards further alignment, integration, and acquiescence, each in its own way perhaps arguable, may just be the step that crosses the boundary towards permanent appointment as continental deputy sheriff. That is the borderline on which we now stand.

As important as it is to us, it has import and meaning for the broader international community as well. What we do in carving out a separate, if connected, trajectory from our powerful neighbour has meaning and significance for many others in the world. In 1969 Pierre Trudeau likened our position to the US as sleeping in the same bed with an elephant, you have to be careful it doesn’t roll over on top of you. Many others are now in the same connubial relationship. Strange as it may seem all the world is now like Canada, wrestling with how to contend with US dominance. As the Kuchma request showed, for many countries our intricate system of treaties, cross border institutions, good relations and innumerable private transactions were seen as a model of how to share a common space with a powerful neighbour. Now, post 9/11, and in the present hegemonic mood of the United States, how we creatively continue to maintain close ties, yet retain our freedom of action, can be a template for others to emulate. We are on the front line. If we can’t keep our identity while living in proximity to a great power then many others will suffer the same fate.

The biggest mistake we can make in this pathfinder role is to become too fixated, too preoccupied, too compliant, too tied down in bilateral dealings. Being one-dimensional and obsessed with our southern border is a short sighted prescription. You simply can’t deal one-on-one with a country as powerful, tough and as aggressive as our friends to the south and hope to escape pressures to conform. Those who counsel such a course are leading us down the wrong path.

Instead, we should play to our strengths as an active player in an increasingly crowded global village that is a swirl with a proliferating constellation of associations, networks, organizations and coalitions. A recent Globe and Mail story headlined, “Canada Jumps in
Ranking on Globalization”, detailing how this country has become one of the leading countries in its adaptation and aptitude for global activity, not just in economic terms, but in the range of political contacts and use of information technology. The authors of the study conclude that we are one of the countries best equipped to maneuver in global circles. Bricker and Greenspon, in their latest book, report on the increasing appetite and confidence Canadians display in competing in the world – just ask our two Olympic hockey teams.

Use our capacity as a joiner, convener, builder and implementer of multilateral, perhaps super-national, bodies to exercise influence and set agendas. Tap into the globalizing instincts of Canadians, their desire to move and shake abroad to establish presence and position. Extend our appetite for being wired into an international communication strategy. Make the global village our turf. That is what the global index is telling us.

The surge of globalization has opened new avenues of endeavour. We see this in recent examples of Canadian leadership in the Commonwealth, the G-20, the OAS. We have been the author and organizer of several new international institutions, the Arctic Council, the Human Security Network. We have a reputation as honest and constructive citizens whether acting as government, civil groups or business organization, with one or two exceptions. The more we expand and enhance that role, the more we can operate according to the navigational guide of our own Northern Star, not as a lesser light in a US galaxy. The more we immerse ourselves in the work and activity of global networks, developing the social capital of the international system the better our chances of keeping our actions distinctive and in accord with our own choices.

Sergio Marchi, former colleague and Liberal member of parliament from this area until becoming our ambassador to the WTO, made the case in simple and clear terms in a recent speech to the Canadian Club when he said: “In the end, the best way to achieve our nation’s trade and economic goals (to which I would add security and political) is through multilateralism.” Amen.

Paradoxically one place to start is in our own continent. We need to conceive a broad concept of security that first includes Mexico, second establishes a transparent and functioning trilateral system of consultation and participation of all three parties and sees North America not as a fortress, but as a community.

A few years back US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, the Foreign Secretary of Mexico, Rosario Green, and I established a trilateral session of Foreign Ministers that met two or three times a year to go over a host of North American issues arising from our common occupation of the continent. One of the distinct advantages of being in a framework with Mexico is having a partner in dealing with the colossus that sits between us. If you are a one hundred and eighty pound half back faced with blocking a three hundred pound defensive end you better have some help. Canadian officials still find this hard to accept, nurturing anachronistic fondness for what they believe is a special relationship, so they never liked the idea, and have quietly dropped the trilateral approach.
Just this past week Mexico’s current Foreign Secretary, Jorge Castaneda, writing in the opinion section of The Globe and Mail signaled the Mexicans have an equal interest in maintaining good relations with the US built on set rules and institutions, offsetting peremptory demands from Washington and seeking parity in decision-making as we do. If there is to be an active pursuit of security cooperation, then the trilateral process should be resurrected and brought into play.

In fact we could learn invaluable lessons from the Mexicans on how to enlist public and political support in the USA. They have over thirty consulates, spread around US regions compared to our ten. They are able to network, make contact at the local level, tap into opinion and solicit support. Getting outside the Washington beltway to develop an understanding and more knowledgeable American public, forging alliances with sympathetic Americans whether it be softwood lumber or UN peacekeeping is an essential task of public diplomacy. Just think of how successful Sale and Pelletier were in righting the wrongs of figure skating judges. Maybe they need to give lessons to our foreign policy establishment.

More than process is involved. We need to author good ideas to address serious security concerns inside a North American framework, recognizing that the best defence is a good offence. During our trilateral meetings three issues of common concern came to the table: transportation, energy and water. Each in their own right could be the topic of a separate lecture. But let me give you the flavour.

Transportation corridors: utilizing the best green and blue technology was discussed, combining major environmental and security techniques in a cooperative fashion. Joint planning on how to engage internationally on addressing upstream transit security, in ports of origin were looked at, instead of huge expenditures on border cops as proposed by our Senators.

Energy is already seen as a major security issue as a consequence of September 11th and because of uncertainty in the Middle East. So far we have been basically reactive to Washington initiatives. They announced a continental energy policy based on expanding supply… we respond by promising to expand production. But there is a complication, if not a contradiction. We have also committed to reduce carbon emissions under the Kyoto agreement. So far the two don’t mesh. There is an American sponsored continental energy plan, but not a corresponding plan for climate change. Hence we are in an emerging domestic dustup because of the perceived disparities. The option is to bring the three counties together to discuss a cooperative strategy on melding energy and environmental plans that would be compatible in a sustainable way. A task force that I chaired for the Manitoba government recommended a North American emissions trading agreement that would provide a market mechanism to reduce the economic costs. Simply put, the emitters pay for conservation efforts that reduce carbon. It is but one idea that could form the basis of a serious North American strategy designed to meet international obligations.
Water looms large in the future of North American security issues, both in its availability and its management. We began pilot projects under the International Joint Commission to put in place preemptive planning and effective cross border procedures for making decisions on water before driven by crisis or conflict. It is time to ask Mexico to join the Commission and give it a mandate to begin working on a blueprint on water that preserves the right of each country to manage its resource, inside a mutually agreed system of management of a scarce resource. We mustn’t be afraid to tackle such issues, as long as they are in a serious rule making, trilateral framework. Much better than being forced by congressional fiat, as we are already experiencing in the Midwest cross-border water sheds.

I use these examples to show three related but important aspects of the security debate. First, the issue of security cannot be narrowly defined. It is not exclusively, or even primarily, a military imperative nor should it be obsessively focused on the Canada-US border. We need to think creatively about how to rewire the institutional, treaty and political circuitry into a North American context if we are to maintain the ability to exercise right of decision-making. The existing framework is antiquated and, at times, irrelevant. We can no longer rely on ad hoc transactional diplomacy in Washington to protect our interests. It is an unequal contest. At the same time buying in to a US dominated and managed organization is exactly the wrong way to proceed. We need to propose a trilateral procedure respecting the autonomy of each of the partners as a way of addressing security issues.

Secondly, we have to get our domestic act together. This is not business as usual, as we have so obviously seen since September 11th. A great deal is at stake and the national priorities needs centering on the way of preserving our independence and promoting our global role. This should not be a defensive posture, but a proactive, made in Canada policy that enjoys the support and understanding of Canadians. To make this happen there must be a maximum of openness and public debate, not decisions behind closed doors. It should begin with the Liberal Party. With a convention in the offing it is time for a serious review and debate a la Kingston, Peterborough, Harrison Hot Springs, an opportunity to establish a distinctive liberal take on a crucial issue facing the country.

Parliament must truly become the forum for the people in debating these issues. I applaud the decision to initiate reviews of foreign and defence policies (a similar review on economic integration would be a nice complement). To make these reviews work and Parliament to have a voice there must be a real effort by the academies, the think tanks the media, the civil interest groups and business leadership to inform and engage in a serious look at new paradigms and propositions. Time to get away from old shibboleths and cranky characterizations of anti-Americanism or pro-continentalism. We are handicapped and diminished by the paucity of new ideas and dynamic intellectual reasoning. Breaking out of the box, using brainpower to find solutions should be a liberal priority.

Talk however is cheap, unless there is a commitment of significant resources to translate ideas into action. There has already been a draw upon the treasury to beef up border
control and to pay for the military action in Afghanistan. These are immediate expedients. Are we also prepared to allocate what is necessary to bolster foreign aid, particularly to restore our international reputation as committed and concerned people in the fight against disease and the prevention of conflict? Let’s retool defence expenditures to provide for mobility and surveillance capacity and contribute to an UN rapid reaction force. Expanding our diplomatic network, both in North America and around the world, is essential to give effective presence and profile to Canadian issues and interests, and enhance our global intelligence gathering. Transportation infrastructure, as part of a North American network, investment in environmental technology, renewable energy resources and conservation measures, a plan for the protection and improvement of our water supply, and an international information strategy all become ingredients of a broad based human security program that must be paid for if Canadian leadership is to be taken seriously.

In 1993, when the Chretien government came to power in the midst of an economic crisis of confidence the call was made for a national effort to restore our economic integrity. It worked, the country responded, and we fixed the issue. A similar call to action is needed today to preserve our political integrity.

That call to action goes to the heart of the special, distinctive contribution that Canada can make to the search for security, which is to see it as a human security issue indivisible and universal, a public good for all people, not just as a national security issue, select and exclusive to certain groups or countries, based on an outmoded concept of sovereignty. Forty per cent of the victims in the World Trade Center were non-Americans from eighty different countries, including Canada. The attackers were from a variety of nationalities united in their hatred of the values and principles of what they saw as a corrupt, secular, insensitive and dominant ruling global system. They used the tools of modern finance, communication and transportation to penetrate the defences of the strongest nation in the world. The risk they represent cannot be met by one country or even a coalition of countries acting alone or in isolation from the rest of the world. Everyone has stake. Innocent people around the world are at risk from the dark underside of the global system, which fosters the growth of drug cartels, human traffickers, arms traders and terrorists.

September 11th brought North Americans face to face with this reality. In a sense, we joined the rest of the world in recognizing our vulnerability. The threats to life and livelihood of ordinary people that has been the stalking, everyday fear of so many around the world… we now share and it reminds us of our common humanity. Viewing the breakdown of order, the failure of marginal states to provide responsible government, the gross violations of human rights, the increase in violence against individuals by government, warlords, and criminals and the scarcity of public goods, the most important of which is security; recognizing that we cannot immunize ourselves from the impact and effect of these forces, we must come to understand that it requires a reordering of the global compact. We can no longer afford to say “we don’t have a dog in that fight.”
Our vocation as Canadians should be to be tipping agents in bringing about a change in
global practices and policies. The opportunity is upon us in at least three very distinct
global developments all bearing strong traces of Canadian paternity. First, is the
imminent coming into force of the International Criminal Court, only five nations shy of
attaining the sixty ratifications to trigger its establishment. Here is the first new
international institution of this new century, the cornerstone of a universal system of
justice that will hold those who commit crimes accountable and establish the base of a
global rights revolution, to use the phrase of Michael Ignatieff.

Next month we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Canadian Charter of Rights, one of
the great contributions of liberalism to the defining of a Canadian culture of rights and
tolerance. The Statute of Rome offers the same potential internationally. We can take the
lead in asserting the rule of law over the rule of force. We played a major part in its
creation of the court; we must now make a similar effort in its implementation and in the
campaign for its universal acceptance, even though there is opposition, notably from the
present US Administration.

Running in parallel is the chance to substantially change the basic definition of
sovereignty in order to enhance the worldwide protection of innocent people. After
witnessing the mass murders, genocides, and ethnic cleansing that marked the end of the
last century, and having wrestled with the anguish and effort of trying to mount
humanitarian interventions the Balkans, Rwanda, East Timor and elsewhere a
fundamental debate arose on when and where and by what means the international
community can come to the aid of people under threat and override the rights of
oppressors to hide behind a wall of sovereign jurisdiction.

In response to a call from Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, Prime Minister
Chretien announced the establishment of a Commission on Sovereignty and Intervention
to initiate a global inquiry. Last December the Commission responded with a creative
definition of sovereignty. It is not the impregnable refuge of national interest but should
be seen as “the responsibility to protect”.

To quote the report: “The debate about intervention for human protection should focus
not on the right to intervene but on the responsibility to protect.” Such a responsibility
implies an evaluation of the issue from the perspective of the victim, not the intervener; if
a state cannot provide the protection or is the author of the crime, then it forfeits its
sovereign right and the international community steps in. And the responsibility to
protect means more than the responsibility to react, but also the responsibility to prevent
and rebuild.

The key is to have this new “responsibility” properly debated and eventually passed by
the UN General Assembly next year. It can be the launching of an effort to change the
concept of state responsibility and the meaning of sovereignty; putting in place a different
norm and standard for judging state action, of combating state terrorism, rooted in the
universal right of security for the individual. What we began we should now complete
and in so doing provide a value added to the make over of the global system.
The place where we can propel along this global liberal agenda is June when we host the G-8. Here is a chance to enlist the power elite of the world in a serious examination of new ideas and new structures, not a customary practice for some, but one that could give this meeting substance and scope. The Prime Minister’s initiative in putting Africa on the agenda has drawn attention to a continent that has been sorely afflicted by human insecurity and suffering due to conflict, violence, crime and terrorism. What better place to put into practice substantial efforts to protect people by prevention, reaction and rebuilding of asserting the responsibility to protect as the touchstone of a new global regime of justice and rights.

I can give you a clear example of what it would mean from a recent tip to northern Uganda, right on the border with Sudan. For the last fifteen years a vicious conflict has killed thousands, forced 4000,000 thousand into security camps rampant with squalor and disease. Those who leave the camps to forage for firewood or water are in imminent jeopardy from the land mines strewn about by the rebels and the army. Children are readily kidnapped and turned into child soldiers or in the case of the young girls forced into long years of sexual slavery. It is a forgotten part of the world, doesn’t draw CNN to display to the world its misery.

Yet the suffering and tragedy of its people is as great as the tragedy we witnessed on September 11th and deserves an equal response. There are real heroes at work in this region – NGO’s, local aid workers. At the local hospital, started up three decades ago by a Canadian woman, I discovered that a year and a half ago they became the firewall in stopping the spread of the virulent Ebola virus brought to the area by the armies fighting in the conflict. Twelve doctors and nurses died in a heroic action, not only saving the lives of thousands in the area, but also preventing a potential escape into the wider global community. They didn’t get their picture on the cover of Time Magazine, but in my view they deserve our heartfelt thanks. Their effort should be a wake up call to the rest of us that we can do no less.

The narrative of politics is the human story, not the soliloquy of the state. This is story that needs telling at the G-8.

I began by raising the question of what border liberals should defend. Are we to become enmeshed in a complicated set of arrangements and entangling commitments as part of homeland security? Or is there an alternative, much more in keeping with our values, our talents and our interests? I would say the there is another border where we can make a stand. It is not working for a world that divides itself into enclaves of privilege and power; where force and military dominance are the measures of who governs. It is to choose to work for a world based on the rule of law, with a respect for universal human rights; where the responsibility to protect the innocent is a global standard.

This is not a trouble free prescription. It means sticking one’s neck out and expending political capital. It means expecting to fail at times and learning to accept frustration and disappointment. But, it is a task we can perform.
The question is: Are we ready and willing to be at the centre of an international effort to revise the global system? This is a choice that can’t be made in the backrooms or in cloistered diplomatic clubs. It clearly is a turning point. It has to be the product of an open, transparent, democratic debate, the kind of exchange that liberals held in the Chateau Laurier ballroom four decades ago.

As a Canadian liberal it is my fervent hope when and if such a self examination takes place that we will emerge with this answer to the question of where we stand, saying to the rest of the world, particularly those who seek our help, people like the children of Gulu in Northern Uganda… “We Stand on Guard for Thee.”

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