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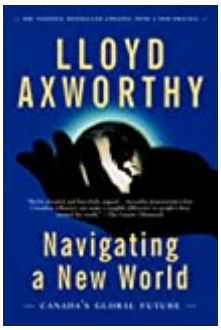

Lloyd Axworthy. *Navigating a New World: Canada's Global Future.* Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003. xi + 450 pp. (cloth), ISBN 978-0-676-97463-8; $17.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-676-97464-5.

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Transnational Leftists and the Invidious Uses of Soft Power

We have heard of late a great deal of disputation about world order and international law; most of these disputes dwell on the respective rights, duties, and shortcomings of the United States and the United Nations. Such arguments normally pit the pro-American supporters of national sovereignty against internationalists who wish to construct international or supranational institutions capable of constituting a viable system of what is called "global governance." This volume by the former Canadian foreign minister Lloyd Axworthy will be of interest to students of current international politics as a representative statement of the arguments, sympathies, and rhetoric of Western left-liberal internationalists.

Axworthy is best known for his sponsorship of the so-called "Ottawa process" which led to the treaty banning anti-personnel landmines, formally known as the "Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Antipersonnel Mines and on Their Destruction," signed at Ottawa on December 3, 1997. Landmines have been used as weapons of depopulation in places like Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Cambodia, with horrific human costs. Axworthy's landmine treaty succeeded in promoting awareness of the problem and in mobilizing support around the world for demining programs. Significantly, the United States is the world's largest contributor to such efforts, its (to many minds notorious) refusal to adhere to Axworthy's treaty notwithstanding.[1]

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines, an activist group founded in 1992, did much to put the issue on the international agenda, while the support of Princess Diana did the cause no harm. Inconclusive discussions of the question went on at the United Nations for years. Axworthy decided to circumvent the UN process by convening a group of "like-minded countries," featuring chiefly minor European nations and their dependent third-world clients, to write and sign a treaty banning landmines. Election victories by the left in the United Kingdom and France brought those countries into the process, and in short order 122 countries signed what became known as the Ottawa Treaty. Axworthy had mobilized humanitarian opinion around the world to do what traditional diplomatic methods had been unable to do. This seemingly impressive achievement is at the cen-

ter of Axworthy's story, and he believes that it points the way to progress on other security issues in the future.

In Axworthy's telling, we live in an increasingly interdependent "global village" of some 190 nations of vastly differing size, wealth, and power. Growing in number and importance are non-state actors such as business corporations, "civil society" organizations, and "NGOs" (pp. 214-217). These latter two classes of organization are given a large part of the credit for his landmine victory, and of course numerous commentators on international affairs have pointed to the increasing influence of such non-state actors. Axworthy clearly approves of the phenomenon, but fails to specify, with any analytic clarity, what an NGO or civil society organization might be: ExxonMobil is obviously a non-state organization, but clearly does not possess the kind of elevated moral character that Axworthy imputes to NGOs. An activist group like the landmine coalition or Greenpeace can claim to be non-governmental and rooted in civil society (itself a fuzzy term), but what about the Christian Coalition, the National Rifle Association, or the Veterans of Foreign Wars? Obviously, some organizations are more civil than others. Axworthy, a working politician for the past thirty years, also has a doctorate in political science from Princeton; unfortunately, he uses his key terms with the abandon, indeed the advertent fuzziness, of a politician rather than the precision of an analyst.

In a stimulating recent article, John Fonte of the Hudson Institute has written of "an ideological civil war" within the West, pitting "transnational progressives" against conservative defenders of "liberal democracy."[2] Axworthy's volume is a useful example of the discourse of transnational progressives: his preferred "non-governmental organizations" are identified less by their distance from government than by their ideological predilections. Indeed, many "non-governmental" groups find their social base among state-employed classes (unions, and environmental and educational/academic groups, for instance), and others are subsidized in whole or in part by governments that find their activities congenial.

The current focus of many of the governments and groups that supported the landmine ban is the effort to create a supranational International Criminal Court, and many of the "civil society" and "non-governmental" organizations supporting that project are in fact subsidized by states such as Axworthy's Canada. Some states, in other words, find an alliance with transnational leftist elites and their mouthpiece NGOs to be a useful diplomatic tool. Axworthy recognizes this fact, and indeed positively celebrates it, although he, like most progressives, is loath to recognize the elite and state-centric character of his own projects.

The central defender of Fonte's "liberal democracy," with its necessary supports of national sovereignty and limited government, is of course the United States. It is no surprise that Axworthy, like members of transnational progressive elites around the world, reviles the Bush administration. Donald Rumsfeld's well-known declaration that the "mission defines the coalition, and not the reverse," is taken as a sign that the United States refuses to listen to allies and places itself above international law (p. 90). That reaction to alliances reflects the Pentagon's experience in the Kosovo war of 1999, during which Axworthy was the Canadian foreign minister. In that war, the Americans found their military operations hampered by the need to secure approval for every mission from each of nineteen states; Jacques Chirac notoriously boasted of his ability to obstruct allied operations, saying that if there were bridges standing over the Danube, it was his doing. Following the war, Canada and Germany used their support for allied action, and the imagined moral credit they had accumulated, to raise, in alliance councils, the divisive and ideological topic of nuclear first use–a modest military effort was used by Axworthy and his German cohort Joschka Fischer as a licence to disrupt the alliance. Axworthy's account of the Kosovo war evinces no recognition that the Americans might have little time for such invidious, obstructive and moralistic behavior on the part of militarily minor allies (pp. 177-199).

Axworthy is a Canadian nationalist, and Canadian nationalists, like the nationalists of many other second-class Western powers, construct their ideology against the putatively bellicose, intellectually simplistic, and morally tainted Americans. Axworthy presents Canada as a moral superstar, writing that it became, in the 1940s, the first nation to renounce nuclear weapons (pp. 358-360). He conveniently forgets the arming of Canadian F-104 fighter-bombers with U.S. tactical nuclear weapons and the Canadian deployment of nuclear-armed Bomarc air defense missiles during the Cold War. Axworthy indulges in the kind of self-reconstruction also visible in Belgium's recent attempt to represent itself as a moral superpower, not inadvertently consigning that country's infamous colonial history to the historical *oubliette*, and in the attempt of France, long notorious for its cynical and obstreperous self-interest, to present itself as a champion of multilateralism and international law.

These nationalist self-reconstructions and their associated historical forgettings are easy to mock, but nevertheless politically powerful, as anyone observing recent anti-American demonstrations and related intra-alliance spats must acknowledge. The nationalists of second-class powers get to have their cake and eat it too: they imagine themselves cosmopolitan internationalists while retaining all the emotional gratifications of national prejudice. This book is a useful illustration of these polemical dynamics–dynamics, of course, present throughout the non-American West.

For all his oversights, Axworthy is onto one big truth: many of the 190-odd, supposedly sovereign denizens of his "global village" have few of the classical attributes of national sovereignty. Within the West, only the United States is really capable of independent, large-scale military action, the traditional coinage of sovereignty. It is hardly surprising that those without such "hard power" should have taken up Joseph Nye's famous concept of "soft power." For the elites of minor powers, the attractions of "soft power" are numerous: it justifies claims to both importance and morality, and it elides all too easily with leftist disdain for the American wielders of hard military power. Fonte's "transnational progressives" are often drawn from non-American (and sometimes anti-American) Western elites: the minor nationalisms of second-class powers merge easily into the left-liberal internationalist ideology of transnational progressives. It is a phenomenon that bodes ill for future Western unity. Any student of international politics looking for an example of these polemical dynamics will find them on full display here.

Axworthy's canonical achievement, the Ottawa landmine treaty, could form the basis of a case study of the divisive potential of the uses of soft power by secondary Western nations. According to the International Coalition to Ban Landmines, forty-four countries have declined to sign the treaty.[3] Axworthy labels these nations "aberrant," conveniently forgetting that in international law, the name of which he is so fond of invoking, a sovereign power is under no obligation to accede to any treaty (p. 151): the rhetoric of international law has for Axworthy become a weapon against national sovereignty, the foundation of international law. He evinces little awareness of this contradiction. For Axworthy, as for so many on the transnational left, international treaties and organizations are good things, and analysis stops there.

The list of such "aberrant" nations includes most of the countries in the world–from Armenia to Vietnam–that have serious or potential military problems. But of the forty-four nations that have not adhered to Axworthy's treaty, it is of course the United States that is on the receiving end of most of the moral opprobrium that is such a prominent weapon in the armory of "soft power." The U.S. refusal to sign the landmine treaty figures in the customary list of alleged U.S. derogations from international law. There is something profoundly unattractive–something almost adolescent–about the self-attributed virtue of those whose military security has, in the final analysis, been provided by the United States lecturing that power on the weapons that may morally be used in the common defense. It is a frame of mind that builds resentment on both sides, as is demonstrated by Axworthy's obvious anger at the U.S. administration, and his parallel inability to be angry with the West's enemies. On the other side of the equation, those perceived to be sanctimonious limousine-liberals are unlikely to get a serious hearing in Washington, even when they do raise a serious humanitarian issue like that presented by landmines in many third world countries.

But Western disunity is not for Axworthy a problem. For him, and for the transnational elites of which he is prominent and exemplary member, the world consists not of the "West and the rest" but of the rich North and the oppressed South. Under Axworthy's stewardship, Canada was elected to the UN Security Council, where it proudly used its seat to represent the concerns of what he calls "the Global South" (p. 201). The "Global South" largely coincides with what conservatives would call the non-west, but the moral calculus is radically reversed: the "Global South" is understood to be the aggrieved victim of the current Western- and U.S.-led world order. By acting on the Security Council as a kind of tribune of the third world, Axworthy's Canada was able to associate itself with what the left thinks of as the world's good guys, and simultaneously to dissociate itself from what are perceived to be the morally compromised Anglo-Americans. Axworthy's brand of liberal universalism leads to a shift of loyalty away from the Anglo-Saxon world, away from the West and its network of alliances, and towards the non-West, a shift justified by his universalist vision of a supranational global order. It is a derogation of loyalty that is, of course, widespread within Fonte's transnational elites. Loyalties–motivating imagined affinities–are important in politics, and we have in this volume an illustration of the structure of loyalties of an important class.

On one level, this book is a memoir of recent events

by a senior official of a second-class power, and will be a useful, though probably ancillary, source to writers on those events. On another, it is an exemplification of the attitudes of Fonte's transnational progressive elites–elites often coterminous with the national leaderships of secondary Western powers. In the aggregate, the policies of such secondary powers can be important, and their ability to form cross-national alliances with sub-state and non-state actors, to influence opinion, and ultimately to undermine American and Western power is obviously a factor in the current international order. This volume will be of interest to students of current international politics as a somewhat unreflective primary source on the attitudes and the rhetoric of the transnational Western left.

Notes

[1]. See "United States and Landmines," www.icbl.org, March 11, 2004.

[2]. John Fonte, "Liberal Democracy vs. Transnational Progressivism: The Ideological War within the West," *ORBIS: A Journal of World Affairs* 46, no. 3 (Summer 2002).

[3]. "1997 Mine Ban Treaty–NON SIGNATORIES", www.icbl.org, March 11, 2004.