



CANADA AND THE NEW AMERICAN EMPIRE

edited by George Melnyk

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CANADA

and the **NEW AMERICAN EMPIRE**



George Melnyk

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To the people of Iraq in their search for peace,
democracy, justice and freedom

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This book was initiated when the United States and the UK were landing troops in preparation for an invasion and occupation of Iraq, while millions around the world marched against the impending war. The book would not have been possible without the dedication of its contributors, who produced articles on short notice. I want to thank each of them for their efforts. Likewise, the energetic and speedy work of the staff of the University of Calgary Press is to be applauded. Walter Hildebrandt, director of the press, was committed to a book that would be accessible. Designer Mieka West brought her creative energies to the book with her usual enthusiasm and professional care.

I realize that I would not have been able to complete the project if I had not been on a sabbatical fellowship leave from teaching in the Faculty of Communication and Culture during the first half of 2003. I am most grateful for this opportunity. This book was a last-minute decision that I added to other scholarly book-writing projects I was already engaged in. This project overburdened an already stretched capacity. I would like to extend a very special appreciation to my wife Julia who helped me emotionally and editorially. Without her help my juggling act would have collapsed.

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INTRODUCTION

FROM WAR TO PEACE

George Melnyk

An American bomb cloud
in full sunlight
rises from a green
hill bunker horizon
dark density roiling
and lifting
a towering deity
with ears of Mickey Mouse
swelling and shifting
against blue sky¹

Ivan Sundal

The friendly image of a larger-than-life Mickey Mouse has turned into the deadly image of a vaporizing bomb cloud during the last two years because of the American invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq. Iraq has the second largest confirmed reserves of oil in the world after Saudi Arabia. The United States is the largest consumer of oil in the world. Not only does Iraq have an enormous storehouse of oil, it also has the “cheapest production costs in the world, at about a dollar a barrel.”² This cost of production is one-sixth of production costs in the United States. With Saudi Arabia

firmly in the U.S. camp, an independently minded state with grandiose plans like Iraq under Saddam Hussain posed a threat to U.S. geopolitical ambitions in the region. With Texas oil interests deeply embedded in the current Bush administration, what could be viewed theoretically as a match made in heaven has turned into a reality made in hell.

There are four key concepts in the title of this book. The first is “Canada,” the second is the “new American empire,” the third is “war” and the fourth is “anti-war.” The United States and war are one link, while Canada and anti-war is the second link. Ever since September 11th, 2001, when the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington were attacked, there has been a major struggle to win over Canadian public sentiment to either a pro-war or an anti-war position.³ The pro-war side has painted its position as one of unfettered friendliness to the United States and support for its global campaign against its enemies. In the past two years, the United States has invaded and occupied two countries – Afghanistan and Iraq – one with the support and involvement of Canada and the other without. Imperialism works through military occupation, and it is today’s unrivalled American military strength that is fuelling the new imperialism. The question is what is Canada’s role in this new imperialism and what are the consequences of involvement or non-involvement in war for Canadian society?

This book is an examination of this contentious issue from the perspective of the anti-war side of the debate. When Iraq was under attack and the world displayed a near-unanimous condemnation of the invasion and its justification, anti-war sentiment was global and very loud. For example, more than 200,000 Montrealers marched against the war in March 2003. Even in the right-wing, pro-American oil centre of Calgary over five thousand citizens marched in the largest anti-war demonstration that city had ever seen. This outpouring of

anti-war sentiment was unable to stop the invasion. Opposition from major European allies, especially France, and from a ringing chorus of foreign governments was unable to stop the invasion. With the U.S. and British invasion and occupation a *fait accompli* and the United States trying to drag the UN into recreating Iraq in a manner suited to the United States, the tone of global opposition has softened as various governments position themselves around the energy banquet table and seek a return to “normal” relations with the U.S. superpower. The establishment media suggests that the new prime minister, Paul Martin, will turn Canada into a staunch ally of the U.S. war machine, unlike Jean Chrétien, his predecessor.⁴

There is little likelihood that future invasions of small weak states by the United States can or will be stopped. After the Iraq experience, when most of the world stood against the United States and yet failed to stop the invasion, Canadians should not be asking themselves how the United States can be prevented from continued imperialist expansion and its now-realized ambition of global hegemony. Instead, Canadians should be asking themselves how Canada can remove itself from the imperial equation by embracing the anti-war side.

When Canada refused to join the United States and Great Britain in its falsely justified aggression, Canada stood with the world community in voicing opposition to what has become the new imperial world order of the twenty-first century. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States became the world’s sole hyperpower, and with that power came a renewed U.S. military aggressiveness that went far beyond the usual machinations of the Cold War (exceeded only in Vietnam) or the geographic limits of the Monroe Doctrine, in which Central and South America were U.S. fiefdoms. Other than Europe (an ally) and the two regional powers of Russia and China with their limited spheres of influence, the world

remains open to unilateral U.S. control and, if necessary, occupation.

Canada has not been shy about supporting the United States in its military campaigns ever since 1991, when it participated in the Gulf War. This was followed by the use of Canadian airpower against Yugoslavia in 1999 and the use of ground troops in Afghanistan in 2001–2003 in support of American objectives. In the 1990s Canada was part of the new militarism, whether under the guise of Security Council approval or as a member of NATO, and it continues to be a military adjunct of U.S. ambitions in a very real and costly way to the Canadian taxpayer. This is particularly true of Afghanistan, where Canada is supplying several thousand occupying troops (termed “peacekeepers”) under the banner of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force.⁵ The refusal to participate in the invasion of Iraq was a departure from this basic thrust. The implications of that refusal and how it came about and what the refusal means for Canada’s future is the core of the fifteen essays presented in this book. The authors, who come from a variety of backgrounds – academic, activist, and political – speak out of a Canadian experience and understanding that is still very much in process as the new American empire unfolds before us. The authors support the peace option for Canada over the war option, and they explore the ways in which Canada can maintain an independent foreign policy in the midst of an unparalleled push for imperial power.

The push for empire is cloaked in the reactionary, U.S.-originated “clash of civilizations” argument that claims that Islam, especially in the Middle East, is the enemy of the West and must be subjugated because it is a threat.⁶ Just as godless communism was the monstrous other of the Cold War for U.S. capitalism, so now a new religious and ideological enemy has been created to replace the former. The new fear of “terrorists”

(read Arabs) has replaced the old fear of “communists,” but it is the same old fear-mongering. The “us versus them” universe created by war, scape-goating, and political lies such as those that justified the invasion of Iraq (supposed weapons of mass destruction and links to terrorism), none of which have been shown to be true, is precisely the universe that the authors in this collection oppose.⁷ They want Canada to play a role in helping the Iraqi people in their search for peace, democracy, justice, and freedom from occupation.



The book is divided into three main sections and an afterword. The first section is titled “Thinking” and is meant to allow readers to gain a critical perspective on the history of Canadian, American, and Iraqi relations. The first essay by Douglas Roche, a senior Canadian parliamentarian, long-time peace activist and foreign development critic, and author of numerous books on international issues, outlines in a clear and forceful manner the choice that Canada needs to make if it is to maintain an unbiased international presence. Next, the role of the Canadian and North American media in creating the Middle Eastern “Other” is explored with chilling insight by Tareq and Jacqueline Ismael of the University of Calgary. These scholars identify the anti-Muslim bias of the media as one of the major stumbling blocks to peace. Philosopher Trudy Govier of Calgary, the author of a best-selling text on critical thinking, a work on social trust, and most recently a critical look at the events of September 11 (*A Delicate Balance: What Philosophy Can Tell Us About Terrorism*) exposes the lack of logic at the core of the arguments used to bolster violence as an appealing solution to international conflict. Liberal member of Parliament Colleen Beaumier and her assistant Joyce Patel provide a detailed history of the humanitarian crisis caused by a decade of UN sanctions, which helped to devastate the

Iraqi economy and impoverish its once prosperous people. The section concludes with an analysis by University of Regina adjunct professor of human justice Jim Harding, who takes a long, hard look at the ideological underpinnings of the new American empire and what the Bush Doctrine of U.S. military invincibility means for Canada.

The second section, titled "Acting," provides perspectives by those actively involved in opposing the war on Iraq. It documents their peace activism, beginning with Dr. David Swann of Calgary, who offers an autobiographical account of his fact-finding trip to Iraq in 2002, just prior to the invasion. His moving account is followed by the passionate voice of the Very Reverend Bill Phipps, former moderator of the United Church of Canada, who presents his reflections on how faith stands in the forefront of global peace activism. Donn Lovett provides a fascinating insight on how one very ordinary Canadian citizen was able to move diplomatic mountains to further the peace option. He also explains what he and others are trying to accomplish in Iraq today by creating institutions of civil society. Dr. Arthur Clark of the Department of Clinical Neuro-sciences at the University of Calgary and founder of the Dr. Irma M. Parhad Programmes for peace and international understanding at the University of Calgary makes a lucid argument for greater individual citizen responsibility in opposing war and upholding international law. Dr. Robert Hackett of Simon Fraser University is a scholar on media and democracy and former co-director of NewsWatch Canada. His essay outlines the basic corporatist structure of North American media and suggests strategies for finding alternative news sources that provide counter-establishment perspectives on peace and democracy. The section concludes with Canadian studies professor George Melnyk's argument that the United States has created a paradigm of endless war in which it seeks and expects Canadian complicity. He concludes his essay with

a call for a Canadian boycott of U.S. products, services, and visits in order to help wean Canadians from their dependence on the United States.

The final section, titled “Observing,” offers three international perspectives on the Canadian dilemma of peace versus war. The section begins with former U.S. Marine Scott Ritter’s account of his experiences as the UN’s chief weapons inspector in Iraq during the 1990s and his view of Canada’s role in the inspection process. Ritter is best known for his 1999 book *Endgame: Solving the Iraq Crisis*, which was followed by *War with Iraq: What Team Bush Doesn’t Want you to Know* (2000). His insider’s account raises questions about Canada’s commitment to its peacekeeping role in the inspection process. His essay is followed by a comparison of Mexico and Canada’s reaction to war and invasion. The refusal of both countries to participate suggests to Dr. Hussain, professor of international studies at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, that there may be increasing grounds for Mexican/Canadian cooperation in international affairs. Dr. Satya Pattnayak, associate professor of sociology and director of Latin American studies at Villanova University, sees the unilateral approach of the United States as unrivalled from an international balance of power perspective. He discusses how this reality limits Canada’s desire for seeking solutions to international conflict through a multilateral approach.

The final word belongs to Mel Hurtig, a prominent Canadian nationalist, who provides an epilogue for the book. He points out how the economic imperatives of NAFTA, the Bush administration and its representatives, the continentalist interests of Canada’s business elite, the uncritically pro-American Canadian media and the Official Opposition have come together to wage war on an independent foreign policy for Canada. Unless the economic knot that ties Canada to the United States is loosened, he argues, the pro-American war

editorializing of these sectors will continue to restrict Canada's commitment to multilateralism in international affairs.

The American and British occupation of Iraq and its appointment of a puppet government has been revealed as simple, old-fashioned imperialism. For example, the U.S.-appointed Iraqi Governing Council has announced that it was opening up the country to foreign investment by privatizing the whole of the state-owned Iraqi economy, other than oil.⁸ The announcement was described as “a free-market economic laboratory, with levels of foreign ownership and privatization never before seen in the Arab world.”⁹ The privatization is being engineered by a U.S. firm that received a \$US80 million contract to do the work. Privatization includes the foreign ownership of Iraq's national banks, a move welcomed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, key agents of U.S. capitalist expansionism.¹⁰ Meanwhile, life for the people of Iraq remains oppressive, chaotic, arbitrary and unpredictable, and very dangerous.

Because of Canada's intense economic ties to the United States and its continued participation in international entities like U.S.-dominated NATO, the pursuit of a peace option in an era of increased U.S. aggression is a profound and disturbing challenge for Canadians who oppose war. And there are more war clouds on the horizon. The U.S. paradigm of endless war, growing out of its unchallenged military domination, point to more U.S.-initiated wars in the future. The cost in human lives and national infrastructures will continue to grow as U.S. missiles, bombs, bullets, and artillery shells rain down on innocent women and children and poorly armed opponents. A U.S. peace activist who served as a “human shield” in Iraq during the American invasion remembered her week as a volunteer in a Baghdad hospital after the bombing had stopped:

It's just sobbing doctors, because there was so much death, so much horror.... It was just death after death after

*death. From babies to old men and women, the whole range. Amputees. Arms gone, legs gone. Children filled with shrapnel from cluster bombs.*¹¹

If this is the scenario from one relatively short invasion, the outlines of a new imperialism involving many wars is truly frightening. The peace option is now needed more than ever, and its promotion as a cornerstone of Canadian foreign policy is something that will require the hard work, dedication, and humility of many Canadians.

I leave my readers with two images. The first is a CTV news broadcast on 8 November 2003 that showed American soldiers placing plastic bags over the heads of suspected insurgents so they could not see and could barely breathe. This kind of action by occupying forces, once condemned, is now considered normal and does not even raise an outcry. The second image is of a pile of books in a remaindered section of an independent bookstore at about the same time as the television broadcast. The book was published earlier in 2003 and contained poems by Canadian writers opposed to the war. The books were being sold at a deep discount. It is so easy to forget, to turn to other matters, to get on with our lives. In his foreword to *The Common Sky*, Alistair MacLeod wrote: "Throughout recorded history, it has often been the responsibility of the writer to speak out against the monstrosity of war."¹² The contributors to this book, like the poets, have responded by taking their responsibility for peace seriously. Let us hope many Canadians will continue to participate in this noble, but difficult struggle.

Notes

- 1 Poem published with the permission of the author.

- 2 John Cassidy, "Beneath the Sand," *The New Yorker* (14 and 16 July 2003): 66.
- 3 See Karim-Aly Kassam, George Melnyk, Lynne Perras, eds. *Canada and September 11: Impact and Response* (Calgary: Detselig, 2001) for a collection of essays on Canadian perspectives on September 11th.
- 4 One small example is a story on the Pentagon's Richard Perle, a leading proponent of the new imperialism, who commented negatively on the Chrétien legacy. See Drew Fagan, "Leading Bush advisor criticizes Chrétien's failure to help U.S.," *The Globe and Mail* (25 September 2003): A1.
- 5 Matthew Fisher, "Canadian general to lead peacekeeping efforts," *Calgary Herald* (27 September 2003): A4.
- 6 To see how this plays out in the Middle East see the interview with the Pakistani dictator, General Pervez Musharraf in *The Globe and Mail* (26 September 2003): A15, in which he says: "There is a general feeling that maybe the Muslim world or the religion of Islam is being targeted by Western governments.... While the perception in the West is the opposite, that Islam as a religion is a religion of extremism, terrorism, fundamentalism, intolerance."
- 7 In a far-reaching review of the bogus arguments put forward by Bush's ally, Tony Blair, and an analysis of American imperialist ambitions, Michael Meacher, the UK's environment minister from May 1997 to June 2003, concludes that the United States and the United Kingdom created "a political myth ... to pave the way for ... the U.S. goal of world hegemony, built around securing by force command over the oil supplies required to drive the whole project."
- 8 Doug Saunders, "Bagdad opens door to free market," *The Globe and Mail* (22 September 2003): A1, A9.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid., A9.
- 11 Jennifer Frey, "A Human Shield's Undying Memories of Iraq," *Calgary Herald* (17 May 2003): OS1.
- 12 Alistair MacLeod, "Foreword," in *The Common Sky: Canadian Writers Against the War* (Toronto: Three Squares Press, 2003), p. vii.