



## CANADA AND THE NEW AMERICAN EMPIRE

edited by George Melnyk

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**ACTING: PEACE ACTIVISM AND THE  
GLOBAL ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT**

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## FINDING MY VOICE FOR PEACE

*Dr. David Swann*

### **Personal Background**

My life was generally a pleasant adventure in a middle-class upbringing in Calgary, Alberta, in the latter half of the twentieth century, including six years of medical training. I had a vague sense that life was not like this for most of the planet. In spite of sympathy I could see little relationship then of those suffering in poor countries to my way of life. Travelling to South Africa in the late seventies to work in mission hospitals during apartheid changed my consciousness. Apart from the daily struggle to meet basic needs for most Africans, I discovered the price people paid to speak out against the white government. At the time Steve Biko, a courageous black activist, was killed in a jail cell near the Black homeland where I worked, with barely any media coverage. Speaking out is a costly matter and I was conscious, as never before, that I too would pay a price if I spoke out on discrimination in South Africa. I continued to do all I could medically, with a vague sense that, without political change, little would change in the health and opportunities for Black Africans.

Following my return to university to specialize in public health in the mid-1980s, my family and I went to the Philippines with a Primary Health Care project for one hundred communities. There I took the next step in understanding structural violence and the inequitable world order, in which I began to see Canada's part. As one Filipino peasant said in despair to me, "If I speak about the corruption I will be killed. If I don't speak about it, my family and I will starve!" This summed up the dilemma of life: telling the truth and not telling the truth can both be fatal where there is no justice and civil society. The stark desperation of life there and the appalling environmental decline left me profoundly depressed for many months after returning to Canada.

The 1991 Gulf War occurred soon after my return to Canada from the Phillipines, and I found my voice, both writing to political leaders and speaking locally for alternatives to the war. It was clear that Saddam Hussein's brutal regime had to be removed from their illegal occupation of Kuwait, but alternatives to war were never exhausted.

This led to my growing involvement in the anti-sanctions movement in the 1990s, against the decimation of Iraqi civil society, frequent bombing, and the destruction of basic infrastructure. In violation of the Geneva Convention and other international law, the water and sanitation damage contributed to appalling death rates, especially in the first few years. Conservative estimates from WHO and Red Cross place the death toll at over 750,000 children by 2002, due to malnutrition and lack of basic medical care, which had been part of an advanced health care system in Iraq until the 1991 war. Through the Canadian Network to End Sanctions on Iraq, we encouraged all citizens of conscience to speak against this misguided policy of economic and social deprivation in the name of containing a bad dictator.

## From Kyoto to Baghdad

In October 2002, while employed by a regional health authority and, following ten years of public health work in rural Alberta, I became increasingly involved and outspoken on environmental and health issues including air quality and fossil fuel use, the health impact of intensive livestock operations, tobacco control, and the national strategy for gun control. As president of the Society of Alberta Medical Officers, I released our position supporting the Kyoto Protocol as good policy for health and the environment in Alberta. The Alberta environment minister was actively campaigning at the time against the Kyoto Accord, and the chair of my health board was his constituency president. I was fired within days of expressing this position and, only following a national outcry was I invited to return to employment there – an invitation I found to be disingenuous and rejected in favour of focusing more attention on the crisis unfolding in Iraq. Even in Alberta I was discovering the price of speaking out!

My dismissal galvanized my awareness of three key issues: firstly, democracy is not free; secondly, the fossil fuel industry (especially in Alberta) is a major political force; and thirdly, powerful interests will go as far as possible to maintain control. How far they will go depends on the balance of interests such as independent media, other organized voices, and political accountability. I had little time to reflect on these philosophical and political realities at the time and, after recovering emotionally, felt a sense of relief that I could now get more involved in the worsening crisis unfolding in Iraq.

With public and media interest in me and in the humanitarian issues in Iraq, I was able to communicate the link between our dependence on oil in the western world (and resistance to the Kyoto Accord) and U.S. vested interest in Iraqi

reserves, the second largest in the world. The link between government power, the oil-military interests, and media conglomerates in both countries was too obvious not to expose. It was clear to many of us that war would be terribly costly to the Iraqi population and risky for not only the Gulf region but for the future of Arab–Western relations in the future. From a health and humanitarian perspective I needed to communicate the profound risks to the Iraqi population of war and global stability if the United States violated international law and carried out a pre-emptive strike under the guise of protecting itself from terrorist attacks.

### **Iraq Mission: November 2002**

Talk of war was well established in the fall of 2002, and it suddenly occurred to me that we were about to observe a terrible human catastrophe in Iraq from the security of our North American living rooms. The thought appalled me and I contacted Physicians for Global Survival (PGS) in Ottawa, the Canadian Red Cross, and a friend with Doctors Without Borders with two questions: what planning had been done to assist with this disaster in Iraq and was there an opportunity for me to go to Iraq, even at this late time, to assess medical preparedness and provide information to Canadians on what was needed?

PGS, a non-government organization committed to education for the prevention of war and elimination of nuclear arms use, responded positively to the idea, and I travelled to Iraq between 16 November and 16 December, 2002, via Amman, Jordan. Travelling with me was an Iranian Canadian, Dr. Amir Khadir, with Médecins du Monde, from Montreal, with similar goals. Our independent reports were produced within weeks of returning and circulated to colleagues, activists,

and politicians across Canada in hopes of strengthening the budding anti-war movement. In my report I tried to sketch briefly a picture of the very hard life of people in Iraq under the most brutal sanctions in history. These sanctions followed two decades of relative abundance and development as a result of their oil wealth, including inexpensive food, cheap transportation, and free, modern health care and education for all. Clearly the contrast for Iraqi citizens was painful indeed, and most blamed the U.S. Administration and its influence at the UN for this decade of suffering – not Saddam Hussein.

In Baghdad I met a retired engineer who spoke of the prospect of war in this way: “First you tell me I have a headache, and then, to relieve me, you decide to chop off my head!” Given the carnage of the war that ensued, these comments return to haunt many of us. I met only a single individual who believed war was the best solution to the problems of terrorism or the oppression of Iraqis. No one is disappointed at the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, but the cost both to the country and to international institutions, including the UN, has been great.

Dr. Khadir and I experienced an extraordinary cooperation and assistance by Iraqi officials in meeting with individuals and humanitarian organizations we chose. Some of the mortality statistics were disturbing indeed and, while produced by credible organizations, such as UNICEF, could not be verified from primary sources.

We reviewed government data and reports from UN agencies (United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, and WHO), non-governmental organizations, and committee meetings. In addition there were numerous interviews with International Red Cross, CARE, Médecins du Monde, Enfants du Monde, Première Urgence, and Architects for People in Need relating to disaster preparedness in Iraq as well as with many citizens and health workers, including physicians and nurses in Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul.

## **Our Findings**

Since Iraq was seriously cut off from the world, the sanctions stifled human development at all ages and in every walk of life. The Oil-for-Food program, started six years after the end of the Gulf War and managed by the UN, provided the minimum of basic foodstuffs and medicines for survival. The psychological toll was evident in all our interactions and surely contributed to massive increases in medical demands.

Individuals and families we met were remarkably helpful and accepting of our mission and gave an important human dimension to the study. One family – that of Karima in central Baghdad – had particular challenges even without the war. This widow of eight years coped with great courage with her nine children in a two-room dwelling, selling condiments on the street. Three of the teen children were also working to keep the family fed and could not attend school, despite a keen interest. Twin girls of twelve years playfully tried to teach me Arabic during my three visits to their home. They all survived on the monthly rations of the Oil-for-Food program – flour, rice, sugar, tea, lentils, oil, and a few vegetables. The father had been killed in his taxi when the brakes failed – a predictable consequence of economic sanctions.

## **Hard Facts**

The physical environment in Iraq (air, water quality and sanitation, vehicle and building safety) was poor and placed extra risk on all, but especially on the most disadvantaged. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2002) reported 60 per cent access to safe drinking water, but this assumes a functional pumping system with consistent electricity, which is not the case. Garbage is seen everywhere

– streets, parks, empty lots, and playgrounds – attracting rats, packs of wild dogs, and poor people, young and old. Public service was extremely limited due to lack of trucks and cash to pay employees. Vehicles were abysmally maintained, except for those of the wealthy. Taxis were missing door handles and even lights. Even with marginal braking systems, they travelled at high speeds and polluted terribly. Roads were not maintained well during the sanctions, and, especially outside Baghdad, multiple hazards existed. Vehicle-related injury was commonplace, as would be expected, and there was minimal evidence of traffic control.

The economic conditions for over half of the population were desperate and caused widespread anxiety and stress, particularly when unexpected expenses arose such as home maintenance and health problems. With the sanctions since 1990, the dinar, formerly equivalent to US\$3, was devalued by over six-thousand-fold, forcing people to sell personal possessions to survive. Many people, especially young people, gave up school or career in order to feed their families. Some of the monthly food rations were sold in order to meet such pressing needs. According to the UN many aspects of the food program were functioning with 94 per cent of funds for food, housing, and oil spare parts being available to those in need. Other sectors such as water, sanitation, education, electricity, agriculture, and health received substantially less of designated funds. The September 2002 UN Report on the Humanitarian Program indicated satisfactory distribution of commodities by the former Iraqi government, given the limitations in communications and transportation in Iraq at the time.

The entire health sector was profoundly degraded: lack of manpower and training, particularly in nursing; breakdown of infrastructure and inability to replace or repair equipment

and acquire new technology; intermittent drug shortages; lack of transportation and weak communications. This contributed to many professionals leaving the country and meant an impoverished and demoralized workforce. Salaries (physicians earned twenty dollars a month and nurses are paid similarly) and working conditions discourage entry into the health professions. Patients had reduced access to care, incomplete investigations, and more expensive treatment options. Preventable conditions were common, due to a combination of marginal nutrition and poor water and sanitation. Diarrhoea, typhoid fever, hepatitis, influenza, and TB were common, with chronic conditions such as mental illness, heart disease and cancer increasing. International organizations, including Red Cross, CARE, and Première Urgence, assisted in some refurbishing of infrastructure in institutions, including water systems, but these remained unreliable due to power outages and drops in water pressure. Certain drugs (20% of essential drug lists) and much electronic and imaging technology were blocked from entry by the UN 661 Committee. Health status improved in some cases, especially in the northern Kurdish areas since the Oil-for-Food program began in 1996. Yet child health in particular remained precarious, with a shocking 24 per cent low birth weight (under 2,500 grams) and over 20 per cent malnutrition in children under five years.

Depleted uranium (DU) used in Gulf War armaments continues to be a plausible cause of the large increase in birth defects and childhood cancers reported by physicians in many hospitals, particularly in the Basra area. This has been noticed especially for leukemias and lymphomas, which appear also to be more aggressive and difficult to treat than in the past. The lack of any systematic review of increased incidence of cancers remains a matter of urgency and should be addressed in objective studies, especially in light of continued use of DU

by the United States and other countries in their arsenal of conventional weapons.

Maternal mortality was another unacceptable result of the sanctions, with 294 deaths per 100,000 live births (three times higher than in 1990) due to maternal malnutrition, iron deficiency, unaffordable or inaccessible care, and inadequate emergency and health care services. Social problems increased in association with declining employment (43% for men; 10% for women) and falling literacy rates (from 90% in 1985 to 57% in 1997; UNDP 2002) as people focused on meeting basic needs. Sanctions included textbooks, computers, and all communications with the outside world, leaving teachers with low morale. Eighty-three per cent of schools were in disrepair, and over five thousand new schools are needed for the current population (UNDP 2002). Other problems included theft and increased numbers of street children, prostitution, and violence, which were rare prior to 1990.

## **Personal Observations**

The people of Iraq touched me in many ways. Despite their suffering, they were cheerful and very hospitable – sharing the little they had with simplicity, humility, and dignity. Despite years of propaganda from their media against westerners, many Iraqis had a maturity and decency that recognized people as equal from our respective countries while seeing political leaders as responsible for problems in both our cultures. Their plea to us, on our returning to our home countries, was to put a human face on Iraqis. “We are not all Saddam Hussein or terrorists. You must stop treating us like insects,” one woman exclaimed. Indeed.

## **Disaster Prevention: A Game Worth Trying**

I argued, along with many organizations across the world and the United Nations, for active involvement in the critical work of preventing, as well as preparing for a U.S. invasion. Indeed the UN's purpose is to "protect future generations from the scourge of war," in part through its Charter which clearly identifies war as legal only where a country is being invaded (Article 51) or under the Security Council where no other option exists to restore peace to a country.

Disaster planning generally assumes the worst-case scenario and designs a strategy to mobilize human and material resources to minimize injury and death before disaster strikes. However, in the case of Iraq, we were dealing with a deliberate, manmade event (war). Among other factors, prevention hinged on a willingness to invest time, energy, and resources toward constructive resolution of conflict equal to that invested in preparations for war.

With weak medical and infrastructure support, extremely variable in each part of the country, extra demands of war meant dramatic loss of access to care for those with existing chronic disease as well as those in acute need during conflict.

## **Areas for Canadian Support to Iraq**

Canada chose to stand with the UN and its Charter against the U.S. invasion, and many Canadians were very grateful for this sign of leadership, even statesmanship. As such Canada can continue to play a moderating role on the United States, foster civil society in Iraq and provide a reasoned voice for the legitimate role of the United Nations in peace-making and in rebuilding the country. The pressing need has become security, which is based on the lack of credibility and

motives of the occupying U.S. forces. Financial and in-kind contributions through existing humanitarian organizations (e.g., International Committee of the Red Cross, MSF, Care International, and Doctors of the World) are critically needed. Faith-based organizations may also have a role to provide direct service to displaced persons, the ill, the injured, and the poor, but the danger is that evangelization could add enormously to the sense of violation of this Muslim land.

### **The Good News**

The largest anti-war movement in human history arose as a result of this war. We know that in this the most violent of eras greater and greater armaments do not lead to greater security: witness the United States spending a billion dollars daily on military and weapons and a homeland security strategy that violates the rights and freedoms of U.S. citizens themselves. The real basis of human security lies in construction of better living conditions, equitable distribution of resources, and international trust. Constructive human and environmental development, unlike destructive war, would reduce rather than increase terrorism. In the post-war context we can see that the unilateral aggression by the United States:

- violated UN principles and process,
- destroyed lives on both sides of the conflict and increased refugees,
- provided no guarantee of better lives for Iraqis,
- risked nuclear and other weapons use,
- further destroyed the fragile environment,
- destabilized the Gulf region and may contribute to civil wars within Iraq,
- will contribute to extremism and terrorism,

- has major economic and social impacts on all countries and their citizens.

It is unfortunate that the U.S. Administration under George W. Bush does not appreciate the degree of violence done to Iraqis and other Arab citizens through its actions. The level of distrust and anger at the United States makes it impossible for it to be seen as a benevolent actor or liberator of Iraqis in this crisis. Other interests of the United States are also too evident – oil, strategic control in the Gulf, favoured relations with Israel, and others.

The UN, representing many countries, and limited as it is by its procedures, is still in the best position to balance individual state interests and preserve world order. It remains our best hope of avoiding arbitrary force by individual states and the endless cycles of violence we have witnessed. Our environments, economies, and social stability depend fundamentally on an international order grounded in law, as represented by the UN Charter and the Geneva and Hague Conventions.

The convergence of powerful political, military, and oil interests in the United States and in the United Kingdom, with compliant media, created an unprecedented momentum for war on Iraq. The rush to war, deliberate undermining of the role of the UN, and U.S. self-interest were revealed largely through the independent media and global Internet communications. The result was a second “super-power,” an international community against the war that gave a powerful voice for an alternative vision for the planet.

## Final Reflections

As a father, a citizen, and a physician, I have thought about what it means to be an ethical and responsible citizen of the world. I have been moved deeply by what I experienced of life in several countries, including apartheid South Africa, post-Marcos Philippines, and now Iraq, and realize the cost of silence. Democracy is only an idea until those of us able to speak and act freely do so. One elderly U.S. peace team member I met in Baghdad, Cynthia Banas, said this, when asked why she planned to stay there through the war: “It seems many people are willing to give their lives for war. More of us need to be willing to give our lives for peace.”

For a large number of citizens on the planet, this conflict has awakened a consciousness that our very survival is dependent on recovering our vision for democracy, humanity, and the rule of law. We know there is a cost both to speaking and to remaining silent. The war in Iraq has touched us because it is ultimately about who we are, what we stand for in Canada, and what sacrifice we are willing to make to create a more sane and humane world for us and for our children.

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## FAITHFUL COUNTERPOINT TO WAR

*Very Reverend Bill Phipps*

*A soldier deeply experienced in war once said: "I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can; as one who has seen its brutality, its futility, and its stupidity."*

The speaker was General Eisenhower, speaking in Ottawa in 1946. He also warned the world about the destructive, all-pervasive, and suffocating obscenity of the military-industrial complex. The integration of making instruments of war with products for domestic consumption pervades many American industries. General Electric is one example of a corporation with substantial defence contracts. Furthermore, few states of the union (perhaps none) are without companies with defence contracts. Elected officials do not want to jeopardize jobs dependent on the war machine.

It is unfortunate that the current commander-in-chief, i.e., president of the testosterone-laden United States administration, has had no personal, first-hand experience of war. He managed to avoid the Vietnam War, and not because of conscientious objection. The first nine months of the Bush administration were without vision, energy, or program. He had no compelling agenda. September 11th changed all

that. Deeply influenced by his non-elected cabinet and other officials – Rumsfeld, Pearle, and Rice, for example, he found a clear, simple purpose, which was to make war on terrorists. With the new American agenda for the twenty-first century, the war on terrorism provided a popular cover to wage war on “America’s enemies.” When you are commander-in-chief of the world’s most lethal war machine, it is easier to wage war than it is to build peace or attend to a complicated and troubling domestic agenda. And when you have an uncritical Congress, why bother with other divisive and complex issues?

There are three main reasons why the invasion and occupation of Iraq is wrong. First, war is outdated, passé, futile, and stupid. Ironically the destructive power of modern weapons renders them obsolete. Precision bombs are anything but. The cost in civilian life, environmental damage, and sheer dollars is prohibitive, and, except for the boys in power who seem to need their violence-fix, people around the world rebel at their deployment. Sanctions themselves led to at least 500,000 Iraqi deaths, most of them children. The civilian death toll of the actual four-week war is estimated to be a few thousand, but the wounded are in the tens of thousands. We will never know for sure. The depleted uranium poisoning land, soldiers, and civilians is a case in point.

Second, a massive use of force as carried out against Iraq can only lead to further anger and a more-determined commitment to acts of terrorism. Suicide bombers in Palestine and in Iraq itself are lining up to do damage to the enemy. The fear of suicide bombing being one of the few available weapons against the world’s only superpower is very real. It is a new vehicle of guerrilla warfare. It will provide Bush and company with a never-ending threat to U.S. “security” and therefore perpetual war. It is beyond me how the heavy thinkers in Washington can ignore the inevitable violent backlash from a wider band of terrorists. Basic common sense, let alone

human experience, knows that violence begets violence. When the United States pulls out of multi-lateral agreements and international actions, people see no alternative but to fight back with whatever tactics are available. When there is no hope in other solutions, what is there to lose?

Third, war is futile in our “globalized” world. The coordinated global peace campaigns, even before the U.S.-Iraq war started, were unprecedented. The United States may be a superpower militarily, but the countervailing global peace-builders expose the fundamental weakness and laziness of war as an instrument of foreign policy. Millions of people parading on the same day testify to a moral, common cause. A thousand performances worldwide of *Lysistrada* (the ancient Greek play whose women withdrew sex until their men withdrew from war) on the same day testify to humour as an instrument revealing war’s futility. Global multi-faith peace vigils testify to the common religious traditions of non-violence. People who participate in multi-faith peace vigils do so for a variety of reasons. Public vigils declare their viewpoint about war and peace. Such events become personal testimonies to faith and public policy. They demonstrate solidarity with victims and fellow “vigilers” around the world. They embody hope in the human spirit and the Creator (however understood). And many people believe in the power of prayer (again, however understood). Lastly, peace vigils usually represent co-operative solidarity with other peace activism.

Global communication and solidarity instantly reveal the lies and manipulations of the propaganda from the powerful. Each of these ingredients of the new global conscience renders the purveyors of war impotent in their callous and hollow justifications. People question the goal of bringing “freedom” to Iraq when civil liberties are suspended in the United States. When the rationale for war constantly changes, people smell something foul. When no weapons of mass destruction are

found, and no invasion of another country by Saddam Hussein occurs, “regime change” becomes the excuse for war. People begin to mistrust and become cynical. It doesn’t help that some media become cheerleaders for Bush’s war, abandoning their traditional critical function. Reliable language, as well as truth, becomes a casualty of war.

My observation after an extensive exposure tour of Israel and Palestine in January 2003 is that the two sides in that conflict can be characterized as those who are committed to peaceful solutions versus those who have no imagination and therefore rely on violence. There are outstanding people throughout both Palestinian and Israeli societies who could build a lasting peace if the minority war people would step aside. People in both societies are sick of being fearful and vulnerable. People in Israel and Palestine realize the futility of brute force. Their efforts are rarely reported in the media, whose idea of news is yet another suicide bomber in Tel Aviv or a tank rumbling through Hebron killing terrorists and civilians alike.

Then there is the financial cost in addition to the loss of life and ecological destruction. By any moral calculation, spending tens of billions of dollars (the U.S. invasion of Iraq will probably top \$100 billion), killing thousands of people, desecrating the environment, and pummeling infrastructure in order to depose one man is obscene and immoral. Everyone knows that money spent to wage that one war would provide food, clean water, education, health care, and positive economic development for most of the developing world.

On a purely cost-benefit analysis, waging war instead of peace is immoral. The pure waste of the Earth’s abundant, yet limited, resources is both unbelievable and unconscionable. How can anyone justify such expenditures? They can’t. Recent U.S. foreign policy aside, there has been a relentless global movement toward international law, institutions, and

treaties that recognize the futility of violence and promote positive interdependence of all life, including nation states. The International Criminal Court is only one example. It is unfortunate that the United States is withdrawing from these cooperative beacons of genuine hope. The best impulses of American society have much to contribute (as they have done in the past). I believe the bully mentality of the current administration may be the last gasp of weak men on steroids. The international community need not be bullied, bribed, nor beaten into submission to a fading ideology.

I believe the United Nations demonstrated great strength in January and February 2003 when it resisted U.S. intimidation. It took courage for nations who rely on U.S. aid, trade, and goodwill to say “No” to this immoral and illegal war. It was the United States that demonstrated weakness in not having the imagination, commitment, and intelligence to continue the international pathway in containing Saddam Hussein. It was the United States that abandoned the global community, not the other way around. To say Canada abandoned the United States in their time of need was absurd. On 11 September 2001, Canada was “there” for the United States. Just ask those Americans diverted to Newfoundland. Our government joined the United States in pouring billions of dollars into mutual “security.” We joined the “war on terror” against Afghanistan, recommitting troops as the war on Iraq commenced. However, Canada believes in the United Nations and believes, along with most of the world, that increased support of the UN is the best way to peace with justice. By the way, where was the United States in 1939, 1940, and 1941 when Hitler *had* overrun Europe and thousands of Canadians were dying for freedom? They were nowhere, Mr. President.

Through hundreds of global organizations and twenty-first century means of communication, I believe that we are beginning the age of true internationalism. Even the

overwhelming power of the United States will not be able to stem the tide of the irresistible global movement of peace with justice. My work on behalf of peace is centred on my role as an international president of the World Conference on Religion for Peace (WCRP). Founded in 1970, WCRP is an international peace organization representing the major religious traditions of the world. Active in over forty countries, WCRP supports local communities in building interfaith actions for peace. They have been active in creating a climate for reconciliation and peace in such places as Sierra Leone, Bosnia, and Kosovo. In its seventh world assembly in Amman, Jordan, WCRP declared:

*The common ethical concerns embodied in all religious traditions call us to be individually and socially responsible for our neighbours and those in need. They help us draw on the sources of love, duty and responsibility as the foundations that undergird the establishment of justice.*

This global multi-faith organization sponsors work concerning AIDS, peace education, disarmament and security, conflict transformation, justice for children, and a global network of religious women's organizations.

Regardless of theology or doctrine, most religious traditions of the world share a common social ethic. Love of neighbour, peace with justice, harmony with Creation, mutual respect, dignity, and wholeness are ingredients in the ethical framework of the world's faiths. Increasingly the elements we share are greater than our disagreements. I believe that it is time for the mainstream "liberal" expressions of religious faith to step forward as representing the integrating and cooperative spirit of religion in contrast to the divisive "fundamentalist" minority.

No one has a corner on "the truth." One exciting aspect of living in an age of global communication is discovering the

rich experience and traditions of so many expressions of faith. To learn the myths that motivate reverence and compassion; to realize the commonalities of ancient and eternal stories that define who we are; to share the beauty, texture, and vitality of each other's "holy" walk is not only inspiring; it is the future. No war machine nor oppressive ideology will be able to stop this journey into genuine global respect and partnership.

Canada is a place and space where discovering how to live together with all the world cultures is possible. Wherever I have travelled (Africa, Middle East, Central America, Asia), people still express hope and confidence in Canada's vocation as peace-builders. If we don't blow it, we are still trusted. I believe our national identity for the twenty-first century can be one of helping create "cultures of peace."

Our multicultural cities, our strong commitment to the United Nations, our overall foreign policy can lead the way in showing the world that peace with justice is possible. With a growing global jurisprudence, global institutions, and commitment to global cooperation gaining strength and credence, the way of the bully will become the way of the past. Fostered by the gutsy strength of the UN, we witnessed an unprecedented discussion of the legalities and morality of war before the United States invaded Iraq. The world's so-called superpower was forced to act unilaterally in their immoral and illegal aggression. Their defiance of international solidarity was transparent for all to see.

The world still needs to develop effective means to curtail and to control the killing madness of a Saddam Hussein. I believe it is possible. The International Criminal Court is just beginning its work. There's no reason why an effective UN "police force" cannot be developed. The key, however, is the continuing movement of civil society around the world. Closing the gap between rich and poor, creating a culture of peace within which children are raised, respecting indigenous

cultures, honouring the integrity of Creation, and building bridges of international solidarity are some of the building blocks toward peace with justice. Continuing these efforts will render war obsolete.

Peace must be seen in its fullest sense. Peace is possible when the grievances concerning poverty, racism, sexism, disease, and oppression of all kinds are addressed honestly, openly, effectively, and with compassion. When the people of the world embrace one another in common cause, it will be inevitable that “the nations shall learn war no more” (Isaiah 2: 4).

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## PEACE ACTIVISM: A CANADIAN'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE IRAQ CONFLICT

*Donn Lovett*

*“One drop in the ocean, but each drop can swell the  
tide” – Judy Small*

It was fall, 1962. I was thirteen years old and the world was on the brink of a nuclear war. This time the given reason was the deployment of missiles in Cuba by the Russians. Something, apparently, the United States disagreed with. I remember those days as if they occurred last week. I spent six months of my life in constant stress. If I slept, I had nightmares about nuclear war. While awake I constantly thought of nuclear war and the destruction that would result, including my death. I remember the federal Canadian government organization called the Emergency Measures Organization (EMO), telling me that in the event of a nuclear attack while I was at school, I should hide under my desk. Remember, I was thirteen and, even at that age, I knew that “under the desk” was where they would find the vapour from the nuclear explosion – provided, of course, there was someone around to look for the vapour.

I remember one particular Monday evening. I know it was Monday because I delivered the *Star Weekly* magazine on that day. It was September in Winnipeg and after 6:00 p.m. when

the sun was setting and the street was getting dark. Suddenly the air was filled with the unprecedented sound of air raid sirens. I panicked and, running to the first house I could find, I pounded on the door. The man who met me immediately recognized my problem, tried to answer my stream of questions quickly and attempted to calm me. He put me in front of his television to show me that the sirens were part of what the EMO referred to as a “mock nuclear attack,” and I should not be afraid. How dare my government do this to a thirteen-year-old child? They staged a “mock nuclear attack,” sounding air raid sirens without warning. I knew I had to do something to prevent a complete personal collapse. I sought people with whom I could discuss these issues and who were already doing something about the proliferation of nuclear weapons. I joined a peace movement and learned what “one person can do.”

Also, vivid in my memory was the fact that the Cuban Missile Crisis was solved, not because one country attacked another, but rather as an outcome of dialogue. Yes, the Russians sent ships and the Americans countered with more ships, but ultimately dialogue prevented a war and the United Nations was involved in the solution. This message that I received from the events of 1962 still resonates today. That is, that dialogue is still the best way to solve disputes and the United Nations Organization is needed more than ever.

My activism carried me through high school and the Vietnam War. The point is my activism was born out of these events and the tumultuous sixties. In 1981 I found myself living in Baghdad and working for a Canadian company called Canon. We were providing water pipe and fittings to Iraq for the supply of drinking water. The Iraqi regime had decreed that everyone in Iraq would have clean drinking water and properly treated sewage. As a Canadian company, we were doing millions of dollars of trade in Iraq, and I was sent to administer the contracts. My experience living among the people of Iraq

and interacting with them was one of respect, kindness, and honesty. When the Gulf War broke out and the United States talked about collateral damage for the first time, I thought of my Iraqi friends, and so I saw the war from a different perspective than did most North Americans.

I followed the events in Iraq and learned about the effect of the embargo on the people of Iraq and in particular the increased infant mortality. My daughter was born in December 1990 and, being a stay-at-home father, I was deeply involved in raising my child, and I readily empathized with those Iraqis who were losing their children at an alarming rate. Reports of the rise in infant mortality and deaths of civilians were stalled by the United States and the United Kingdom at the UN. They blocked reports coming from the World Health Organization and UNICEF. Finally, the information could no longer be hidden, and the Oil-for-Food program was initiated in an attempt to alleviate the hunger to which years of embargo had subjected the Iraqi people.

We learned that during the 1991 Gulf War, the United States led bombing raids that attacked every hospital, every water treatment plant, every wastewater plant, most schools, and every major intersection in downtown Baghdad in order to destroy the water distribution and sewage collection systems. All attacks against civilian infrastructure are in direct violation of the UN Charter and must be considered war crimes. A good friend of mine, Denis Halliday, the former UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq said: "We are in the process of destroying an entire society. It is as simple and terrifying as that. It is illegal and immoral." Pre-1990 Iraq reflected the status of a modern developing society, in which the wealth it obtained from exporting its main commodity, oil, contributed to improving the quality of life of the Iraqi people. The Government of Iraq made sizable investments in the education sector from the mid-1970s until 1990. Educational policy included provision for scholar-

ships, research facilities and medical support for students. By 1989 the combined primary and secondary enrolment stood at 75% (slightly above the average for all developing countries at 70%). Illiteracy had been reduced to 20% by 1987. Education accounted for over 5% of the state budget, which was superior to the average for developing countries at 3.8%.

After the imposition of sanctions in 1991, we know that:

1. 1.5 million Iraqi civilians have died since 1991 as a direct result of the sanctions.
2. 600,000 of the dead were children under 5 years of age according to UNICEF reports and substantiated by the Red Cross. A recent UN report stated that the infant mortality rate in Iraq is 133. This means that for every 1,000 children born, 133 will not reach the age of five. By comparison, Canada's infant mortality rate is less than four.
3. The number of malnourished children has increased over 300% since 1991.
4. Maternal mortality rates have more than doubled during this period of the sanctions and 70% of Iraqi women suffer from anemia.
5. Unemployment has soared under the sanctions, as has inflation. The average civilian salary, for example, is C\$3.60 per month.
6. An estimated 800 tonnes of depleted uranium contained in ammunitions were used by the allied forces in the Gulf War. Cancer rates in Iraq have increased five-fold since the Gulf War. Childhood leukemia in Iraq has the highest rate in the world.

These undeniable facts lead me to travel to Iraq to view first hand the devastation to the Iraqi civilian population and the complete destruction of the civilian infrastructure and the civilian economy. I could no longer stand by and let the crimes

continue, crimes to which the Canadian government was a partner. Tacit approval of the unjust conditions to which Iraqis were subjected was tantamount to direct involvement in the destruction.

I began to contact people I thought could give me information to help me develop a plan of action to assist the people of Iraq. The first was Denis Halliday. I remembered reading a statement that Mr. Halliday had made after he resigned his position with the UN in protest over U.S. interference in the relief operations in Iraq. He said, "I can find no legitimate justification for sustaining economic sanctions under these circumstances. To do so in my view is to disregard the high principles of the United Nation's Charter, the Convention of Human Rights, the very moral leadership and the credibility of the United Nations itself."

Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed Denis J. Halliday, an Irish national, to the post of United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq, at the Assistant Secretary-General level on 1 September 1997. Halliday served as such until the end of September 1998. During this period, the Security Council Resolution 986 Oil-for-Food Program, introduced in 1996/97 to assist the people of Iraq under the economic sanctions imposed and sustained by the Security Council, was more than doubled in terms of oil revenues allowed. This enabled the introduction of a multi-sectored approach, albeit modest, to the problems of resolving malnutrition and child mortality. Mr. Halliday resigned from the post in Iraq, and from the United Nations as a whole, on 31 October 1998, after serving the organization for thirty-four years.

After running the Oil-for-Food program, which uses Iraqi oil revenues to distribute basic food rations and medical aid to Iraqi civilians, Halliday turned his attention to spreading the word about sanctions-related suffering. I contacted Mr. Halliday in late 1999 and invited him to Canada. We met in

Ottawa for a series of lectures, and I took him to the House of Commons to meet the then Chair of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Mr. Bill Graham. I wanted him to ask Mr. Graham to hold hearings on Iraq at the Standing Committee. Graham agreed immediately and the hearing was scheduled for March 2000. I arranged for Mr. Halliday and Mr. Arthur Millholland, the president of Oilexco, the only Canadian company participating in the Oil-for-Food program, to come to Ottawa as witnesses to the committee. The hearings lasted for three days, culminating in Report #5, "Resolution on Iraq," which was tabled in the Canadian House of Commons on 12 April 2000.

Report #5, which was unanimously supported by the eighteen members of Parliament sitting on the committee and representing all five political parties, called for a de-linking of sanctions. This meant the removal of economic sanctions but leaving military sanctions in place. It further called for an opening of dialogue between Canada and Iraq. The deputy prime minister of Iraq, Mr. Tariq Aziz, accepted Report #5 as a good basis to resolve the situation in Iraq. It was suggested that the secretary-general of the United Nations might use this report as a basis for breaking the impasse on getting proper humanitarian relief to Iraq.

Report #5 was rejected outright by the then Canadian foreign minister, Lloyd Axworthy, and it died without being taken to the UN. The main reason given by senior advisors to Axworthy, at a meeting that I attended, were as follows: "While we recognize the destruction to the people of Iraq, we cannot do anything to upset the U.S. Administration because they will beat us up on trade." One of the senior advisors was a medical doctor who had visited Iraq and had seen first hand the difficulties being experienced by the people of Iraq.

This resulted in two important outcomes for me. I met Madame Colleen Beaumier, the vice-chair of the Standing

Committee on Foreign Affairs, and I discovered that Lloyd Axworthy would not act if it meant confronting the United States.

I invited Madame Beaumier to come to New York to meet with the deputy prime minister of Iraq, Mr. Tariq Aziz. She agreed and the meeting was arranged for September 2000 at the Iraq Permanent Mission to the UN in New York. We discussed Report #5 as a basis to solving the economic embargo on Iraq while agreeing that at this stage the military embargo had to remain in place. The meeting was cordial and it was the first time that parliamentarians from Canada and Iraq had met since the Gulf War. By now Canada had closed its embassy in Baghdad, even though Iraq maintained a *chargé d'affaires* in Ottawa. The action now became one of getting individual MPs to endorse Report #5 in an attempt to get a majority of the 301 MPs to sign a letter addressed to the prime minister (and copied to the foreign minister) demanding that Canada accept the results of the report drafted by the Standing Committee. We received unanimous support from the Bloc Québécois, the New Democratic Party, and the Progressive Conservatives, while individual members of both the Liberal Party and the Alliance Party, led by Dr. Keith Martin, agreed to endorse the report. We had the support of 127 members when Parliament was dissolved on 22 October 2000, and an election called. This nullified our efforts until after the election.

A new parliament was elected in November 2000, and we restarted our efforts to get Report #5 accepted by the Canadian Government. However, we now faced a new resistance. John Manley was appointed to the position of foreign minister, and he took an even closer stance with Washington. During Manley's tenure, Canada moved as close to Washington as Canada had ever been. This caused individual MPs in the Liberal ranks to distance themselves from any initiative that may confront the United States. We also witnessed a hardening

of a pro-U.S. position with the Alliance Party, under their new leader, Stockwell Day. Although we still held the support of the Bloc, the NDP and the Tories, getting majority support was becoming increasingly more difficult. This, combined with the election of the neo-conservative Bush administration, made the matter of getting a resolution of the Iraqi sanctions almost impossible. It became clear to me that removal of sanctions could not happen without the return of the weapons inspectors and a resolution on the question of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs), which became the buzzword of the Bush White House.

At this time the Bush White House had little or no interest in foreign relations. It seemed hunkered down in an isolationist mentality until the attack on the World Trade Center in September 2001. The ensuing “War on Terrorism” set a course for Bush and his neo-conservative cohorts that continue to affect the world in a seriously negative way. The appetite for war, demonstrated by Bush after the September attack, provoked me to call a meeting of international diplomats and interested individuals to meet in New York to see what we could do to dampen the U.S. enthusiasm for war. I contacted Denis Halliday and Hans von Sponeck, both former United Nations humanitarian coordinators in Iraq. I contacted Scott Ritter, the former U.S. marine major and head of the UN weapons inspections in Iraq from 1991 through 1998. I also asked the former foreign minister of Canada, Lloyd Axworthy, to join us, along with the president of the Canadian oil company, Oilexco, Arthur Millholland. Lloyd Axworthy had had a change of heart since leaving Ottawa and wanted to see what could be done to ease the pressure on Iraqi civilians. All agreed and a meeting was arranged for the end of November 2001 in New York, ironically held at the Republican Women’s Center. Mr. von Sponeck could not join us but was in contact via phone and e-mail.

Although several ideas were discussed, it became clear that the return of the weapons inspectors was the only way out of the impasse. It was thought that Canada could play a role, given that it had an outstanding reputation at the UN and was not an imperialist nation. Iraq might accept recommendations coming from there. However, John Manley was still foreign minister in Canada and not predisposed to anything that may confront the United States. We decided to continue discussions and to formulate a plan that could be discussed between Canada, Iraq, and the UN.

Lloyd Axworthy agreed to discuss our meeting with Louise Frechette, a Canadian and the deputy secretary-general of the UN, and with Colin Powell, the U.S. secretary of state, whom he was to meet with at dinner while he was in New York and Washington. Conversations within the group continued over the last part of 2001 and into 2002.

In January 2002, Prime Minister Chrétien appointed Bill Graham as the new Canadian foreign minister, and hopes for a more sovereign Canadian position with regard to the United States gave us a reason to quicken our attempts to get the weapons inspectors back into Iraq. By this time Denis Halliday and Hans von Sponeck were now concentrating their efforts in Europe. Arthur Millholland was in the UK and busy with his business efforts. Lloyd Axworthy became busy with his UBC institute. It was left to Scott Ritter and me to continue the discussions started in New York in the fall of 2001.

Scott Ritter arranged to meet with the Labour Party in the UK and the French Government to discuss the return of the inspectors. I began to build support in Ottawa with MPs with whom we could work. Notably, Madame Francine Lalonde of the Bloc, Dr. Keith Martin of the Alliance, Joe Clark of the Conservatives, and Alexa McDonough of the NDP were contacted, and they agreed to keep in touch with the initiative. Madame Lalonde became quite active and was a strong source

of support. I was in constant contact with Madame Colleen Beaumier, who gave us access to the Liberal caucus.

Meanwhile, I developed a relationship with Robert Fry, the senior advisor to Bill Graham, the foreign minister, as well as with Chris Hull and Graeme McIntyre from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). Through Robert Fry we could get access to the foreign minister if the matter was significant enough. At this point we were feeling quite encouraged and I asked the Standing Committee to meet with Scott Ritter to discuss the return of weapons inspectors. Thanks to the efforts of Madame Lalonde and Dr. Martin, the committee agreed to meet with Scott Ritter and Denis Halliday in early June 2002.

The meeting with the Standing Committee was very successful. Scott Ritter was able to convey the importance of getting the weapons inspectors back into Iraq as a necessary step to getting the economic sanctions removed. There was a sense from the meeting that Canada could play a role once the inspectors had returned. Scott Ritter and I then met with Madame Lalonde to develop a document entitled "The Honest Broker." The thrust of this document was to ask Iraq to agree first to the return of the weapons' inspectors and then to permit Canada, South Africa, and Belgium to help mitigate any difficulties that might arise between Iraq and the UN as a consequence of the inspections. These countries would not interfere with the inspectors themselves because they recognized that the United States would not tolerate any interference with the inspection process. However, situations might have arisen requiring some form of reconciliation between the UN and Iraq during the inspections. Canada was chosen because it is the major trading partner of the United States with a close historical, political, and geographical relationship. South Africa was chosen to represent the non-

aligned nations and Belgium because of its membership in NATO and the EU.

In August 2002, Scott Ritter went to South Africa to meet with the Tariq Aziz of Iraq, Mr. Pahad, the deputy foreign minister of South Africa, and the Belgian foreign minister. During these meetings it was agreed that Scott would go to Baghdad to address the Iraq National Assembly on 8 September and during the presentation would discuss the return of the inspectors. South Africa and Belgium agreed to cooperate with Canada, if Canada would take the lead on the “honest broker” initiative.

Meanwhile back in Canada, I stayed in touch with the prime minister and the foreign minister to ensure that, at the very least, Canada would continue to support the UN and not support U.S. unilateral actions. On two occasions in July and August of 2002, in direct phone conversations with Prime Minister Chrétien, I was assured that Canada would keep supporting the UN. On 9 August 2002, at a meeting with Bush in Detroit, Mr. Chrétien reiterated Canada’s support for a UN resolution to the Iraq situation. At the same time I had met with Minister Graham, who also assured me that Canada would stay with a UN resolution. They have maintained that position, and I believe that Canadians should be very proud of their actions in the face of the tremendous pressure from the United States. I was in the Canadian House of Commons on 17 March 2003, when the prime minister announced that Canada would not support the U.S. war on Iraq. This was one of the bravest things he had ever done.

Scott Ritter met with the Iraq National Assembly on 8 September 2002, and told them in no uncertain words that they had to allow the inspectors to return and that there was no room for negotiations on this matter. Further, they had to advise the UN that they would accept the inspectors before the United States was able to get a resolution before the UN

that they would not be able to deal with. Iraq accepted what Scott Ritter had to say and dispatched Foreign Minister Sabri to New York for 14 September.

While this was being organized and unfolding, Bush was dragged kicking and screaming to the UN on 12 September. This happened through the efforts of a number of countries including Canada and the United Kingdom. He appeared at the UN because there was virtually no support for U.S. actions against Iraq and Bush felt that the United States could beat the UN into submission. The timing worked out for Iraq, which had agreed to come to New York for 14 September and, through a series of negotiations in New York that I was involved in, made its proposal to the UN through Kofi Annan on 16 September 2002. The proposal allowed for a return of weapons inspectors to Iraq with no conditions attached. The negotiations were finalized in November 2002 and the way was paved for Hans Blix to return to Iraq after four years without inspections.

The return of the inspectors neutralized the U.S. demand that Iraq disarm. However, it soon became apparent that the United States was not interested in a disarmed Iraq but rather wanted control of the country for several reasons, not the least of which was Iraqi oil and the fact that in their war on terrorism they had not been able to find Osama bin Laden. The United States then moved to the language of “regime change,” and the world began to respond to their actions, culminating in the mass rallies held worldwide on 15 February 2003. Tens of millions of people protested the U.S. position, including 1.5 million people in London, who opposed Tony Blair’s pro-U.S. stance, and one million people in Rome, who opposed their government’s support for the United States. Spain saw hundreds of thousands of people in Madrid and Barcelona protesting the Spanish government’s support of Bush. As a result, the United States changed its rhetoric from

“regime change” to “liberation of the Iraqi people and a change in human rights.”

In January 2003 I organized a parliamentary delegation to go to Iraq with the knowledge of both the prime minister and the foreign minister. Madame Colleen Beaumier and her able assistant, Natalie Jewett, joined me on the trip. In Baghdad we met with the deputy prime minister, Mr. Tariq Aziz, the foreign minister, Mr. Naji Sabri, the Iraq trade minister, the communications and transportation minister, the deputy agriculture minister, and the deputy speaker of the Iraq National Assembly, accompanied by several members of the Assembly. The purpose of the trip was to convey to Iraq the Canadian position with regard to disarmament and to receive any message that Iraq wanted put before our government. The Iraqis asked one thing and that was for Canada to maintain its position in support of the UN.

We arrived back in Canada on 29 January 2003, and worked non-stop to try and reach agreement on an initiative that would prevent the United States from invading. This involved a two-stage proposal. Initially there was the six points for peace plan that was developed through the efforts of Scott Ritter and the deputy foreign minister of South Africa, Mr. Pahad, and was an extension of the Canadian initiative that was being discussed by the non-permanent members of the UN Security Council in February 2003. After the attack by the United States and the United Kingdom, a modification of that plan which was now being sponsored by the Vatican was tabled. Both of these proposals had been somewhat agreed to by Iraq and involved disarmament, human rights, democracy, diplomacy, economy, and, of course, peace. But as the entire world now understands, the United States and the United Kingdom were not interested in a peaceful solution to Iraq.

The point of this article is to let people know that anyone can make a difference. Although we failed in our attempt to

prevent the United States from invading Iraq, we accomplished great things during the past few years. Canada did not change its position and support the U.S./UK war. Canada maintained its support for the UN. We met with several governments around the world and we felt we influenced their decisions. Often it is very ordinary Canadians who make a difference. For example, my twenty-three-year-old daughter, Shanda, travelled to Iraq in 1999 as part of an international women's conference. While in Iraq she visited several schools and talked to children about the sanctions. She was invited to meet with Madame Aline Chrétien and in December 1999 had a ninety-minute audience with Madame Chrétien to discuss her experience in Iraq. Shanda and her younger sister Kate have become anti-war activists in their own right. The unwavering support of my wife Nora has been crucial to both our daughters' and my activism.

Our responsibility now is to ensure that the United States does not become the judge, jury, and executioner for the world. We shall overcome.

### **Epilogue: September 2003**

A large group of activists and academics travelled to Cyprus in April 2003 to discuss what to do next. Out of those discussions came the dream of Dr. Tareq Ismael of the University of Calgary to build an International University in Baghdad (IUB). The initial proposal was developed in Cyprus, and it was decided that the initiative should be a Canadian-sponsored one.

The IUB would begin as a "virtual university," meaning that the project will begin to get underway in terms of establishing programs, international connections, and so forth, even before it would acquire a physical presence in Iraq. Once established, however, it will be a graduate-focused institution and would

complement post-secondary education in Iraq, rather than compete in the post-Baath environment. Not only will the university spearhead needed educational programs, but it will also make available a wealth of educated individuals capable of filling the “brain-drain” that resulted from the years of war, militarization, and sanctions. Before the U.S. and British-led attack on Iraq, there were ten universities in the country, but the quality of education provided at these universities was in decline as there was not enough funding available to run these institutions properly, principally due to the UN Security Council sanctions and the choices made by the previous Iraqi government to focus predominantly on militarization. Vast numbers of university professors and professionals, such as doctors and engineers, left the country in the 1990s as a result of the dramatic decline in social services. Now, largely due to the destruction and looting incurred in the recent war and its aftermath, none of the universities in Iraq remain fully functional. This is a predicament that urgently requires attention, as access to education has always been instrumental in developing a lively and independent civil environment.

The established universities in Iraq will benefit greatly from an internationally oriented, graduate studies facility in their country. The IUB will be able to draw students from all over the world to study in Iraq, alongside Iraqi citizens, creating a constructive dialogue that is capable of transcending the simplicities of international conflict scenarios. The breadth of experiences possessed by the international students will enhance the resources and connections that Iraqi citizens themselves would have, fostering greater civil society through an ever-increasing independence from governmental contacts. At the same time, the unique experiences of the Iraqi students – historically, politically, economically, and culturally – along with the potential revival of a “cosmopolitan” Baghdad, will

serve to enrich the international students who would be studying at the IUB.

The planning committee has already garnered a great deal of international recognition for this project, including support from individuals such as Betty Williams, the Irish Nobel laureate, and Jordan's Prince el-Hassan Bin Talal, brother of the late King Hussein, who is acting as the chairman of the board of trustees. Furthermore, IUB advocates include Canada's former prime minister Jean Chrétien, along with Edward Broadbent, former leader of NDP; Richard Falk, professor of international law (emeritus) at Princeton University; and John Polanyi, winner of the Nobel Prize in chemistry and professor of chemistry at the University of Toronto. With the help of other supporters, the IUB planning committee is also currently working to urge Nelson Mandela, former South African president, to become a member of the university's board of trustees.

At this crucial time when many Iraqis see any outside involvement as largely negative and tied to an "occupation" and relate to the international environment in terms of "conflict," the reconstruction of Iraqi educational infrastructure through this project and others will help to provide an example for the positive possibilities of *international cooperation*. Canada is in a unique position to spearhead such a project and should seize the opportunity to foster positive development in Iraq and advance our traditional role as a peacemaker in the international environment.

Over the past few months, we have had meetings with several MPs, senators, DFAIT, CIDA and potential partner agencies such as the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, the Canadian Bureau for International Education, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. We presented them with the following rationale for why Canada should lead this initiative:

1. Canada has had a long-standing relationship with the Middle East and in particular with Iraq. Prior to the Gulf War of 1991, Canada was one of Iraq's primary trading partners, and the Canadian Wheat Board was the largest supplier of wheat to Iraq.
2. Canada is considered a non-imperialistic actor in the region. We have not had the expansionist policies of France, the United Kingdom and the United States.
3. Canada has had a reputation as a Middle Power and a peacemaker in world affairs.
4. The stance that Canada took in the recent Gulf War of not supporting unilateral U.S. action has reinforced Canada's image in world affairs.
5. Canada can exercise a tremendous amount of influence in Iraq and the region by taking these kinds of initiatives.

Anyone who finds this rationale compelling and is interested in helping us realize this project may contact me at [donn@dlagency.com](mailto:donn@dlagency.com). This may be a small step for each of us, but for Iraqi society it is a major leap.

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## **IRAQ, INTERNATIONAL LAW, AND RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP**

*Dr. Arthur Clark*

The United States and the United Kingdom invaded and occupied Iraq claiming that weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq represented a threat to international peace. To date no evidence to substantiate this claim has been found. But the invasion and occupation have demonstrated an unequivocal threat to international peace. By their unlawful use of force against the government of a sovereign state, the perpetrators – and particularly the government of the United States – have made unmistakable their potentially lethal threat to various governments worldwide, and therefore their threat to international peace. There is nothing subtle about this threat, and the “opinion leaders” in the Bush administration seem particularly eager to make the threat clear to anyone paying attention.

This threat did not begin with the Bush administration, and it is not unique to the government of the United States. Lawless violence, cloaked in noble intentions, is characteristic of powerful states. The United States, as the dominant power, is the current prototype. In our culture there is a general reluctance to recognize the threat we pose to others. Norman Cousins in his 1987 book, *The Pathology of Power* noted the tendency of power to create a language of its own, making other forms of communication suspect.<sup>1</sup> The United

States and the United Kingdom are unlikely to repudiate international law outright because they derive massive benefits from the international legal system. But their invasion of Iraq has destabilized the framework for international peace and security, produced thousands of casualties, devastated Iraqi cultural institutions, increased risks to Americans and others, and accelerated the drain of public resources into the military sector of the U.S. economy. Somebody, of course, has benefited handsomely from all this. But that is a topic for a different essay.

Calling for an investigation into the Bush administration's claims about Iraqi WMD has recently become politically acceptable, and even calls for impeachment are beginning to appear. It is not politically correct, however, to do anything that would fundamentally challenge the lawless violence of the government of the United States. Yet that challenge is essential to the future peace and security of North Americans. Any state or institution arrogating to itself the right to threaten others will thereby jeopardize its own security. The costs of maintaining that security will increase, draining public revenues and devastating the lives of individuals. It is unrealistic to think that security for North Americans can be reliably promoted without promoting the security of others. But conventional wisdom accepts the preposterous idea that our long-term security is being enhanced by escalating our threat to other countries. These issues, as elementary and urgent as they are, must be placed in the public arena by concerned citizens. Otherwise, they will not be taken seriously by political and intellectual "leaders."

From the Gulf War until the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003, western policy toward Iraq was based on an intense and sustained hostility to the government of that country. This hostility has had devastating consequences for the people of Iraq. In North America, public support for this hostile policy

has been cultivated using standard devices of war propaganda, notably demonization of the political leadership in the targeted country. Propaganda for war characteristically draws on factual information but removes it from context or places it in a context to evoke support for war. Outright lying is usually unnecessary.<sup>2</sup>

This essay provides some context for the themes which, removed from their context, have been used as propaganda for war against Iraq. It emphasizes the violations of international law by all parties to the conflict. It uses this background as an object lesson on the failure of responsible citizenship in our culture. I conclude with a proposal for a functional concept of responsible citizenship. Implementing that concept can improve the chances for peace and security in the future, not only for Iraq and other countries overseas, but for North Americans as well.

### **Invasion and Lawlessness**

The standard North American view of Saddam Hussein's Baath government in Iraq has emphasized its treachery. Governments are often violent and deceitful, and the government of Iraq under Saddam Hussein has provided an important example. Much more telling examples are the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, since they have had, individually and in aggregate, a far more decisive influence on twentieth-century history than the government of Iraq. Each of those five countries has a history of murderous internal conflict and murderous and aggressive foreign policy.

This treachery of governments has historically been tolerated or supported by their citizens and by their allies. A standard way of achieving that toleration and support is the government's emphasis on the necessity of its own treachery

to overcome an adversary's treachery. To the extent that this argument is effective, the problem will persist.

The case of Iraq illustrates this paradox. The invasion of Iraq by the United States and the United Kingdom was justified on the grounds that Iraq was a threat to the peace. It is irrational to support one government's armed attack on another based on the claim that the country being attacked might do something similar in the future. The invasion was also an assault on the principle of non-aggression, which is a necessary cornerstone of the international legal system. The invasion is illegal, and the argument in support of it is irrational.

Every major act of lawless violence opens a Pandora's box. The invasion and occupation of Iraq were expected to increase recruitment into terrorist organizations and emerging evidence supports the prediction. The U.S./UK aggression will prompt a range of countermeasures from governments around the world. We cannot predict these developments in detail, but the dangers may have massively increased. The larger problem of lawless violence has been made worse by using lawless violence against the government of Iraq.

A powerful state can often persuade the public to abandon reason and common sense in support of its violence and treachery. Because every powerful state also facilitates major positive achievements and conveys important benefits, the grateful public is easily seduced into support for the state's villainy. An act of military aggression by a powerful state will reflect this ambivalent nature. An act of aggression produces irreparable harm and major atrocities. Part of the irreparable harm will be the increased volatility and a waste of resources that attend lawless violence. But the act of aggression will also be associated with ample benefits and positive effects. And the propagandist can use that aspect of reality to recruit support for further acts of lawless violence.

## **Iraq's Brutal Dictatorship**

The rise of Saddam Hussein's murderous dictatorship can be understood in much the same way. It was probably perceived by its supporters as a necessary evil in defence against mortal dangers. In Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), and Chile (1973), more open governments had been overthrown with the assistance of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. The CIA had also helped the conspirators (including Saddam Hussein) who overthrew Iraq's popular revolutionary regime in 1963. Saddam's nationalist Baath party was therefore keenly aware of the danger of internal subversion, and particularly one directed from Washington. Thus the danger of subversion was used to justify the savage internal security apparatus set up by Saddam Hussein. The measure was temporarily successful on its own terms. The CIA never did to the Baath in Iraq what they had done in Iran, Guatemala, and Chile.

## **Iraq's Brutal Repression of the Kurds**

The Baath government had also carried out murderous attacks against the armed Kurdish insurgency in northern Iraq, and villages known to support it. Like so many other acts of the Iraqi government, these attacks were astonishing in their brutality. They exceeded even the Turkish attacks on Kurdish insurgents and villages in that country and rivalled the attacks by Guatemalan armed forces on Guatemalan villages after 1954. This is state terrorism, the form of terror that shaped the meaning of the word in the French Revolution of the late eighteenth century.

All these acts of violence occurred in a context that seemed, to some observers, to justify the atrocities. The Iraqi government campaign was directed against Kurdish factions

that had sustained an armed nationalist movement. An armed insurgency in a country surrounded by hostile states can reasonably be considered a “security threat.”

There had been violent conflict between the Kurdish insurgents and the Iraqi government well before the Baath party came to power in Iraq. The Iraqi government, before and after the rise of Saddam Hussein, used a carrot-and-stick approach in dealing with the threat. In March 1970, an agreement had been worked out between the government in Baghdad and the Kurdish leadership, whereby Kurdish would be the official language of the region and any government official stationed there would have to speak Kurdish. There would be Kurdish representation in the central governing body of Iraq, and a Kurdish university would be established. By regional standards this was a remarkably progressive arrangement, and the accord, sponsored by the Iraqi government, was signed by the Kurdish leadership. But the Kurds continued to seek foreign support for their insurgency, the internal security threat to Iraq persisted, and with it the government’s murderous repression.<sup>3</sup>

## **Iraq’s Aggression**

Iraq’s major act of foreign aggression under Saddam Hussein was directed against Iran, beginning in 1980. It was ultimately responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths and major setbacks to the economy in Iraq and in Iran.<sup>4</sup> Like Saddam Hussein’s other acts of violence prior to 1990, the aggression against Iran was largely ignored or supported by other countries including the United States. That complicity changed suddenly in August 1990, when Iraq launched its aggression against Kuwait, a regional U.S. client ruled by a family dictatorship. Saddam Hussein’s tyranny and aggression

instantly became the subject of unrelenting propaganda for war in the western media.

The death toll resulting directly from Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait is estimated at three to five thousand, higher than the death toll from the U.S. invasion of Panama a few months earlier, but lower than the death toll from Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Neither the U.S. invasion of Panama nor Israel's invasion of Lebanon became the object of effective action from the UN Security Council.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, in the case of Iraq, international law was applied, leading to a series of proposals from Iraq for a negotiated peaceful withdrawal from Kuwait.<sup>6</sup> Those proposals for a peaceful resolution of the crisis represent the intended effect of mechanisms established in the UN Charter.

But the UN Security Council had abdicated its decision-making authority to then president George Bush. Bush rejected Iraq's offers: "There will be no negotiations." By late December 1990, Iraq was seeking guarantees that their troops would not be attacked as they withdrew, that foreign armed forces in the region would go home after resolution of the crisis, that some steps toward resolution of the Palestinian problem would be made, and that some measure to control weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East would be initiated. The last point was a scarcely veiled reference to Israel's nuclear weapons program, which threatened Iraq.

The Iraqi offer was recognized as a "serious pre-negotiating position" by U.S. analysts. Instead of pursuing it, as would be required under any reasonable interpretation of the UN Charter, the Bush (Sr.) administration drove events to a massive escalation of violence. Just the initial phase of that escalation of violence, driving the Iraqis out of Kuwait, is estimated to have cost more than ten times as many lives as Iraq's own actions during the occupation. And that was just the beginning. The internal volatility in Iraq produced by the Gulf War

of 1991 led to uprisings in southern and northern Iraq against the government, with a predictably violent response from Baghdad. In southern Iraq, the United States was complicit in Baghdad's suppression of the insurrection.

The violence of the Iraqi government has arisen in a context of violent actors, from armed insurgents to world powers. If we are ever to achieve a rule of law, aggressors must be held accountable for their acts of aggression. That accountability will have to be consistent, whether it is Iraq or the United States or some other country carrying out the aggression. Otherwise there will be no rule of law. The betrayal of the UN Charter by the UN Security Council itself is made obvious by the grotesque and violent response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and by the utter failure to apply the law of the Charter in response to the U.S./UK invasion of Iraq.

### **Economic Sanctions and Iraq's "Hidden Weapons"**

After Iraq's retreat from Kuwait, the sanctions were extended on the premise that Iraq might be continuing its development of weapons of mass destruction. But Iraq's WMD programs were effectively terminated by mid-1991. Despite more than seven years of intrusive weapons inspections (1991–98), UN weapons inspectors found no substantive evidence that Iraq was developing WMD. Yet the sanctions continued. A rational person might ask why. A rational answer is that they served functions other than that of a serious arms control measure.

Serious arms control measures must involve multilateral agreements and take into account the legitimate security needs of all parties to the arrangement. Forcing one country to disarm when it faces threats from regional adversaries is not a legitimate arms control measure. When the country is additionally

subjected to military assault by the superpower that imposed the disarmament, the problem becomes an obscenity.

The sanctions were, from their inception, well understood to be of a type and severity that would ravage the economy of the targeted country. They represented a state of siege. British and U.S. government efforts to implicate Iraq in WMD production after 1991 were largely designed as propaganda and recently included forged documents, plagiarism, and a series of claims discredited by UN weapons inspectors and by events since the occupation.<sup>7</sup> But for more than a decade the sanctions had an effect on the Iraqi population not unlike weapons of mass destruction, being responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths, according to international observers. Several United Nations officials resigned in protest against the sanctions.

The sanctions were evidently intended to destroy the Iraqi economy, weaken support for the Iraqi leadership, and thus make it easier to recruit collaborators to overthrow Saddam Hussein. The elimination of Saddam Hussein's government was a consistent U.S. policy objective from August 1990 onward.<sup>8</sup> The Iraqi government was certainly aware that it faced a mortal threat. Exactly how forthright should a government be with its mortal enemies? Saddam's "duplicity and deceit," which served so well as North American propaganda, should be understood in this context. Subsequent events have vindicated the Iraqi government's evasiveness.

By cynically playing on the possibility that Iraq might be developing WMD, the U.S. government was able to recruit the UN Security Council to the siege of Iraq and maintain some public support for the economic sanctions. The effect was a sustained assault not only on Iraq but also on the principles and purposes of the UN Charter, and on international humanitarian and human rights law.

## **Iraq's "Threat to the Peace"**

The legal basis of authority for imposing economic sanctions under certain circumstances is contained in Article 39 and other parts of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. Article 39 gives the UN Security Council authority to determine the existence of any threats to the peace and to decide what measures are to be taken in accord with other parts of the UN Charter. Law must be interpreted reasonably, however, if it is to be respected. Iraq's "threat to the peace" must be interpreted in the context of other issues, including the external threats to Iraq's security. Instead, the law was interpreted in a way that served purposes quite different from those expressed in the United Nations Charter.

Even at its peak, Iraq's threat to regional peace was insufficient to defeat Iran, and the threat was rendered marginal simply by removing the external support for it in 1990. For the rest of the decade, the claims of Iraq's "threat to the peace" were themselves largely propaganda for war.<sup>9</sup>

## **Economic Sanctions and International Law**

The legality of the economic sanctions on Iraq after 1991 depended on the argument that Iraq was a "threat to the peace." That argument was fraudulent under any reasonable interpretation of the UN Charter. The economic sanctions on Iraq also failed other tests of legality, including tests under human rights and humanitarian law. Law will be treated with contempt if it is applied inequitably, or if the law is used as pretext to violate the most fundamental principles of the law itself. Both conditions characterize the treatment of Iraq after August 1990. In the case of Iraq, the United Nations Security Council has been subverted to serve the narrowly conceived

foreign policy agenda of the United States. That subversion has led to widespread contempt for the Security Council and has undermined credibility of the United Nations itself.<sup>10</sup>

Yet the United Nations Security Council continues to play a constructive role in some situations. When the United States tried to gain its collaboration in the invasion of Iraq, the effort backfired. Iraq unexpectedly agreed to readmit the UN inspectors, despite the past record of espionage and duplicity associated with the inspections. Step by step the inspections began to discredit U.S. and UK claims that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction. The time gained in this process allowed the global community's opposition to the war to build, and that made it easier for governments and for the UN Security Council itself to reject collaboration in the U.S. invasion.

The United Nations Security Council is required under Article 24 of the UN Charter to exercise its authority in accord with the purposes and principles of the United Nations. It cannot legally impose economic sanctions or approve the international threat or use of force whenever it likes. Had it approved the U.S. use of force, the invasion would still have been illegal. But in this instance the Security Council upheld the Charter. And that is an important achievement.

### **Empire or International Law: A Choice**

An increasingly global community faces a choice for governance in the decades ahead. The choice is between the norms and structures offered by the international legal system or the norms and structures imposed by empire, the international domination by a powerful state. The problem is clear from Henry Kissinger's statement (*Diplomacy*, 1994): "Empires have no interest in operating within an international

system; they aspire to be the international system.... That is how the United States has conducted its foreign policy in the Americas, and China throughout most of its history in Asia.” The United Nations Charter and other instruments of international law are based on principles including the sovereign equality of states and purposes including the maintenance of international peace and security. International law provides a pragmatic system for addressing the problems that give rise to international conflict. It has developed in full and fresh awareness of dictatorships, threats to peace, acts of aggression, ethnic and nationalist sources of conflict, and a host of other problems. Contemporary international law recognizes instances in which armed conflict may be justified. It specifies conditions under which the international use of force may be legal, and it provides mechanisms for effective international action to reject breaches of the peace and address threats to peace, while international humanitarian law places constraints on the conduct of war when it does break out.

Each of the two systems, international law and empire, provides a cultural frame of reference. But the cultural domain of empire cannot be universally coherent. Its preference for domination is inherently alien to those it seeks to dominate. Hence the threat and use of force is necessary to maintain “credibility.” The military means of maintaining that threat carry an ever-increasing cost, with a steady erosion of economic resources. Hostility to the project simmers and grows, leading to the ultimate decline of empire, after decades or centuries of carnage and waste.

The cultural system of empire is designed to induce deference to power and uses human rights as a stratagem. The standards of international law, by contrast, are designed to constrain excesses of power in order to promote human rights. In the one system, power is the primary value; in the other, human rights. The UN Charter’s prohibition on the international

threat and use of force, for example, is intended to reduce the resort to war, which unleashes the most fundamental violations of human rights.

Predictably there are sustained efforts to conflate the two systems. Powerful states hope to retain the advantages but escape the constraints of the international legal system. And the public, on whose approval all legitimate power depends, often have a preference for human rights priorities over those of state power. So publicists will often try to represent their government's violations as being consistent with international law, however ridiculous these representations may be.

The legitimacy of empire and its cultural assumptions have been in retreat for more than half a century. Can clever public relations revive enthusiasm for this anachronism? If so, the costs will be staggering. A rule of law offers advantages over a state of lawlessness. It can promote trust, lower the costs of transactions, obviate expenditures on weapons and allow states to direct their resources to basic social needs and promotion of human creative potential. A rule of law can diminish the waste and carnage of the centuries-old pattern in which governments drive their countries toward bankruptcy through military expenditures and destructive international adventurism. Lawlessness, by contrast, encourages violent and criminal behaviour, wastes resources, and leaves the future to the arbitrariness of power and the hazards of chance.

## **Responsible Citizenship in the Twenty-first Century**

Democracy is based on the concept that a government's legitimacy depends on consent of the citizens. Implicit in that concept is another: Citizens are responsible for the policies and

practices of their own government, including its atrocities and violations of law.

Governments would prefer that their citizens direct their attention only to the atrocities and violations committed by other governments, in particular a targeted enemy state. A game theorist might notice that perpetually identifying someone else as the source of problems can lead to perpetual animosity, distrust, irresponsibility, and conflict.

As a citizen of the United States and of Canada, I take responsible citizenship to mean engagement in democratic process to bring my own government into compliance with international law. I am familiar with the consumerism, careerism, and cynicism of our culture. I understand the challenges they present to “responsible citizenship,” as here defined. I am also closely familiar with a kind of “professionalism” that rejects taking a principled and active role in public affairs, particularly in foreign affairs. Under the terms of this “professionalism,” the professional should be politically neutral in public. But there is no such neutrality. By paying taxes we support government policy. The conditions of democracy require that we play a responsible role in shaping that policy. You cannot stand still on a moving train.<sup>11</sup>

Many will reject any personal responsibility of this kind. That is a choice, and the choice has consequences. Lawless violence carries a high cost. It has erosive effects economically, politically, ethically, psychologically, and socially.<sup>12</sup> The human spirit is resilient and tends to tolerate this erosion, even support it or be oblivious to it. And thus we relinquish the far more constructive alternatives that are available. History will continue to present us with the choice of bringing our government’s foreign policy into compliance with international law, or not. If we choose wrongly we encourage our collective destruction. But year after year through our silence and passivity, or through more active complicity, we have tolerated

or supported major violations of that law. I write this to enable a better informed choice in the future than we have made in the past.

## Notes

- 1 Norman Cousins' book *The Pathology of Power* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987) eloquently examines some of the problems associated with extraordinary political power.
- 2 Propaganda for war and other forms of incitement to violence are prohibited under Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights for good reason. In Rwanda in 1994, such incitement was successful in recruiting many Rwandans to support or even participate in acts of genocide. In North America after 1990, war propaganda recruited public support for the belligerent policies against Iraq that are responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths, environmental destruction, and a number of other crimes.
- 3 One of the Iraqi Kurdish leaders who had not supported the insurgency reportedly responded angrily to accusations from the insurgents that he was a traitor: "My villages are still standing and are still wealthy, my people all dress as Kurds, speak Kurdish and have a good life. Look what your nationalism has done for you. Your villages are destroyed, your people have been forcibly resettled, you live in exile and you have nothing left. Why call me a traitor?" The statement is quoted in David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 1996), p. 377. The March 1970 agreement between the Iraqi government and the Kurdish leadership is extensively treated in Chapter 5 of Edmund Ghareeb's *The Kurdish Question in Iraq*.
- 4 Although the Iraqi aggression against Iran is only briefly mentioned in this essay, it should be emphasized that this carnage simply would not have been possible without the support for that aggression from outside powers. Dilip Hiro's books are outstanding sources on the Iran–Iraq War (*The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict*) and the Gulf War of 1991 (*Desert Shield to Desert Storm: The Second Gulf War*).
- 5 The Security Council resolution calling for Israel to withdraw from Lebanon was essentially ignored because Israel's violation was in effect supported by the United States.

- 6 The Iraqi negotiating position for a peaceful withdrawal from Kuwait was reported in *New York Newsday* on 3 January 1991. These offers generally remained behind the scenes; publicly Iraq was persistently refusing to withdraw from Kuwait. The events were well examined in a lecture delivered by Noam Chomsky to an audience at Bates College in late January 1991.
- 7 The forged documents, purporting to be from Niger and dating from 1999–2000, are referred to in an article from *The Washington Post* for 22 March 2003: “CIA questioned documents linking Iraq, uranium ore.” I retrieved the text of that article through the website, [www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org), which has been an invaluable source for me. A useful article on the destructive effects of sanctions is by Mueller and Mueller, “Sanctions of Mass Destruction,” in the May/June 1999 issue of *Foreign Affairs*.
- 8 A popular revolt, Kurdish independence, and the ascendancy of an Islamic state were apparently unacceptable means to the end of overthrowing Saddam Hussein. Instead the CIA worked with the Iraqi National Congress and the Iraqi National Accord to engineer a more controlled outcome. The resulting coup attempts were repeatedly foiled by the Iraqi regime.
- 9 The level of Iraq’s “threat” after 1991 was well expressed in an article in the *Globe and Mail* of 13 November 1998. Entitled “Hussein Arsenal Still Impressive,” it carried the subtitle “Although a mere shadow of 1990’s armaments, significant threat exists.” In the text, the reporter cited an interview with General Binford Peay, who said, “Mr. Hussein has been gradually improving the quality of his forces. Although he has not managed to even approximate the armament and manpower he wielded when his troops invaded Kuwait in 1990, he still poses a *significant threat to U.S. pilots who might bomb Iraq*” [emphasis added]. In other words, Iraq’s capacity for self-defence (its right under international law) was still substantial, and that was a significant “threat” to future U.S. military plans for Iraq.
- 10 In commenting on the recent bombing attack on the UN headquarters in Baghdad, Denis Halliday, former UN official in charge of the Oil-for-Food program in Iraq, noted that “the UN Security Council has been taken over and corrupted by the U.S. and UK.... In Iraq, the UN imposed sustained sanctions that probably killed up to one million people.... It was a great crime against Iraq.” Halliday’s comments following the attack on the UN headquarters were reported by Neil

MacKay, 24 August 2003, *The Sunday Herald* (Scotland), accessed through [www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org) on 24 August.

- 11 “You cannot stand still on a moving train” is modified from Howard Zinn’s phrase, “You can’t be neutral on a moving train.”
- 12 An article by Burns Weston, “The Logic and Utility of a Lawful United States Foreign Policy,” which appears in *Transnational Law and Contemporary Problems* (Iowa College of Law) 1 (1991): 1–14 points to the destructive power inherent in dismissing international law. The same issue of that journal is devoted to a symposium with a number of other useful essays, including Richard Falk’s “Making Foreign Policy Lawful: A Citizen’s Imperative” (225–40).

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## **DRUMBEATING FOR WAR? MEDIA VERSUS PEACE AND DEMOCRACY<sup>1</sup>**

*Robert Hackett*

Few Canadians, when they sit down to read a newspaper or watch television news or check the Internet, regard themselves as engaging in an activity relevant to international peace. Yet they may very well be doing just that. We need to ask ourselves if the dominant practices and institutions of public communication share any complicity in the bloody start to the third millennium. What difference do the media make in promoting war or peace? What are the shortcomings of media coverage of life-threatening conflict? These questions and what can be done to improve the shortcomings of the media are the basis of this article.

### **Media Framing of the War on Iraq in 2003**

The prospects of war and peace globally are forged in American media and popular culture as much as anywhere else. Canada's direct access and adherence to American media, especially in television, is omnipresent. Canadian-owned media, both print and broadcast, are dependent on U.S. news sources for copy, television images, and photos. The U.S. media tend to

accept the assumptions of empire – that the United States has a right to intervene where its interests are at stake and that it can overthrow governments by force without accountability to international law or the United Nations. The American media can argue that it is their patriotic duty to frame American motives as honourable.

Compared to 9/11, there was, until the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, a greater degree of debate in the American media over military and political options in Iraq, such as the issue of unilateral versus multilateral action. After the United States and Britain invaded Iraq, this debate largely evaporated as the media scrambled to “embed” themselves in flag-waving, soldier-glorifying patriotism. One example of how this played out in Canada is the comparison of coverage of Iraqi civilian casualties relegated to unillustrated back-page copy to the glorifying front-page headlines and photo coverage of the rescue of one American POW. (*Calgary Sun*, 2 April 2003). There are several factors that have contributed to how most American media and many Canadian media framed the post-9/11 “war on terrorism,” including the attack on Iraq, resulting in blind spots for readers and viewers.

## **1. Threatening Events Themselves**

Some events, such as the 9/11 terror attacks, readily lend themselves to an either/or, for us or against us, moral discourse. Building on the humanly and morally horrific nature of the event itself, American media coverage offered an emotionally compelling but ultimately dangerously simplistic story line built around the stuff of legend – heroes, villains, and victims. By contrast, the case for war in Iraq required much greater public relations efforts by the Bush administration. The pre-war period, such as the UN weapons inspection process in Iraq

prior to invasion, left room for differing viewpoints on what is the right response. But the outbreak of war lent itself to an either/or moral discourse. Previous events, like the Iraqi regime's gas attack on Kurdish civilians fifteen years earlier, were selectively invoked by the administration and enthusiastically amplified by the media. Such a strategy of demonization is a crucial part of how the American media typically present their country's wars to its population. Americans as potential victims (of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction) or heroes of a glorious military is contrasted to Iraq as a site of an evil threat. A sense of being threatened frames the "other" as a demon, allowing all sorts of actions to be justified, including war.

## **2. The Views of Journalists and Editors and Their Notion of Professionalism**

While the sense of threat contributes to a powerful "rally round the flag" effect, accelerating media concentration and commercialization have yielded a corporate culture increasingly hostile to radical dissent, or even to the liberal public service ethos associated with the Walter Cronkite generation.

The 'conservatizing' impact of organizational media culture may be even more relevant to foreign correspondents. Reese Ehrlich, a freelance foreign correspondent writes:

*By the time reporters are ready to become foreign correspondents – a process that can take ten years or more – they understand how the game is played. Becoming a foreign correspondent is a plum job. It's interesting and challenging. You travel frequently and meet international leaders. You may see your byline on the front page. The job has gravitas. And then there's the money.... Money, prestige, career options, ideological predilections – combined with*

*the down sides of filing stories unpopular with the government – all cast their influence on foreign correspondents. You don't win a Pulitzer for challenging the basic assumptions of empire.*<sup>2</sup>

With this being the norm for mainstream media reporting, it is not surprising that news stories are framed ideologically in a way in which the media owners, the state, and society in general approve. When renowned U.S. reporter Peter Arnett gave an interview to Iraqi television in which he raised issues about the military strategy of the United States, he was fired.

### **3. News Routines**

Establishment journalism does not want to contextualize news stories, seeking instead to dramatize them in the moral discourse of who is doing what is right and who is doing what is wrong.

With corporate journalism's routine dependence on official sources, elected politicians, and establishment experts, the news stories are framed in a safe and predictable way, however self-serving. That doesn't mean foreign correspondents are mere dupes. They may be well aware of the way their official sources try to manipulate them, and many do question what they are being told. But most do not try to discover what they are *not* being told. And they tend to accept their sources' framing of conflict.

These practices of newsgathering (press conferences held by authorities, etc.) tend to reinforce existing power relations. Oppositional groups are covered but usually as actors rather than as sources. The so-called balanced presentation of an issue usually favours conventional views, reduces complex issues

to a for/against format, and allows elite voices to define the limits of discussion.

#### **4. News Organizations' Needs and Policies**

Since the 1980s U.S. and Canadian media have undergone massive mergers and consolidation into the hands of a small number of huge companies. For them, journalism is often only a small percentage of revenues. They have big debts to pay off for takeovers, and they want maximum returns from their assets. Except in time of war, cutting back on international news coverage makes economic sense.

In this corporate culture there is de facto censorship within the media. After 9/11, several columnists who offered even mild criticism of Bush were fired. In a country with fewer and fewer media employers, it doesn't take too many such examples for journalists everywhere to feel the chill. The Fox TV news channel in the United States has significantly increased its ratings by its all-out support for the war on terrorism by encouraging its correspondents and presenters to express anger and a thirst for revenge and to present the conflict as a biblical battle of good versus evil. If Fox's stance continues to increase ratings, then other TV channels and even the print media could find themselves under pressure to follow its line.<sup>3</sup>

#### **5. Extra-Media Factors**

In the bigger picture, establishment journalism is dependent on the political elite for orientation and the American political elite closed ranks after 9/11. Years of flak from conservatives, convinced despite all the contrary evidence that the media

contributed to defeat in Vietnam, have left the press anxious to prove its patriotism. But the press often does not need much pressure because the institutional context of corporate media makes them natural allies of U.S. militarism and capitalist globalization. These giant firms are among the primary beneficiaries of neo-liberal globalization – their revenues outside the United States are increasing at a rapid pace – and the U.S. role as the pre-eminent world power gets them attention. Indeed, the U.S. government is the primary advocate for the global media firms when trade deals and intellectual property agreements are being negotiated. Coincidentally, at the very moment that the corporate broadcasters were drumbeating for America's new war on terrorism, their lobbyists were appearing before the FCC seeking radical relaxation of ownership regulations.<sup>4</sup>

We should recognize the domination of news flows by a handful of commercial, market-driven, corporate enterprises: AOL-Time-Warner, Disney, Bertelsmann, News International. Bias towards commercial propaganda, consumerism, and neo-liberalism is their underlying stance because they are increasingly operating in global markets, undergoing conglomeration, privatization, and hyper-commercialism. Corporate media are integral to the ideology and process of global corporatization.

Those global media help create global public opinion, which can inhibit (albeit selectively) the violation of human rights by particular regimes; but they also promote a culture of consumerism, which arguably breeds inequality, declining sense of community, and ecological devastation. Notwithstanding the Internet and significant regional media production centres (India, Brazil, Egypt), global information flows are still dominated by media corporations based in the developed West. While playing a crucial role outside the

United States, the dominant U.S. media largely insulate their own population from critical foreign perspectives, perspectives that might enable more informed judgments about their own government's policies.

## **6. Ideology and Culture**

It is small wonder that, on the fundamental question of war and peace after 9/11, American media have largely failed to play the role prescribed for them in liberal theory. This theory presents the media as a “watchdog” keeping powerholders accountable, a public forum helping to formulate a democratic consensus between alternatives, and a comprehensive news provider nurturing an informed citizenry. Those failures and blind spots have undoubtedly facilitated the escalating militarization of U.S. foreign policy. And yet in September 2001, American public faith in the media reached the highest levels pollsters have recorded since 1968. What does this dismal combination – democratic failure and public approval – tell us? Media institutions are influenced by, as well as influence, the surrounding political culture. Just as audiences are part of the media system, so journalists are part of that culture.

The media's pre-Iraq war framing of 9/11 meshed well with the dominant frame of America's experience of war, which in turn is related to the foundational myths of American nationhood as the world's singular beacon of freedom, happiness, and opportunity. In the “theology” of American nationalism, 9/11 was not only an atrocity and a tragedy but also an act of sacrilege, one motivated by incomprehensible evil, outside the realm of politics and history. To the extent that audiences and media shared the assumptions of this frame, the U.S. media's construction of the subsequent war in Afghanistan (2002) and then the war on Iraq (2003) was simply a continuation of the

ideology of threat and demonization. If the world is wired for violence, media framing of issues in America, the world's hyperpower, is a huge part of the problem.

What about Canadian media? Canada is blessed not to have such a tightly woven foundational national myth of a chosen people in a Manichaeian world of good and evil. Canada's identities are more fragmented. As the Quebec sovereignty debate shows, we can't even agree on the territorial or emotional boundaries of the nation. We have five parties in our Parliament and not one and a half like in the United States (Republican and Republican-lite). We have a much stronger public broadcasting tradition in Canada. We have conditions for potentially greater pluralism in our media. But we must not be too smug. Media ownership is more concentrated than it is in the United States, and press barons like the late Israel Asper imposed their own political views on their far-flung properties. Canadian media spread the notion, more or less without challenge, that Canadian military spending is low and that security is lax. The media outrage against professor Sunera Thobani's denunciation of U.S. foreign policy after 9/11 became a lightning rod for those who considered criticism of the U.S. an outrageous affront to a noble ally and friend. She was effectively ostracized in the realm of public discourse, her views put beyond the pale.

### **What can we do?**

There are three points of intervention where media's framing can be challenged. First, there is the role of counter-information. In contrast to the situation in the 1991 Gulf War, there is now a much greater undercurrent of counter-information, which probably contributed to the rejection by global public opinion of the war on Iraq. One factor is progressive websites

that have challenged dominant media in terms of setting agendas. This could be one reason that you sometimes see a growing discrepancy between public opinion and media owners' politics. Among these websites are straightgoods.com, rabble.ca, znet, and altnet. In addition to counter-information, the Net is also an amazing organizing tool. The massive peace demonstrations in February and March, even in the United States, came about with relatively little help from corporate media. To be sure, there is an ongoing digital divide. Neither access to the Net nor the ready availability of non-profit-oriented content can be assured. Progressive movements need to be more aware of the political, economic, and policy context of this 'magical' technology and be ready to intervene to protect their access.

The second point of intervention is the alternative journalistic ethos of "peace journalism." It proposes that, in dealing with a life-threatening conflict or issue, it is important for the Canadian media to identify the views and interests of all parties and so avoid dualism. It is wrong to be hostage to one source. A good sense of skepticism is always valuable. Because bias is endemic to human beings, the media has to be self-critical while giving voice to dissident views. When a report on a conflict seeks to talk about common ground and non-violent solutions, it becomes part of the solution. But these approaches run into obstacles – narrative conventions of polarization, commercial biases towards existing knowledge and values and towards affluent, and the ease and cost of accessing U.S.-based transnational news services like Associated Press.

The third point of intervention is media democratization. Since the 1990s, there has been an upsurge in activism directed towards not just using the media as conduits for political messages, but transforming the media themselves into more diverse, accessible, and accountable institutions. This project is fundamental to democracy. Genuinely democratic media would enable each significant social and cultural group to

circulate ideas, perspectives, and information in such a way as to reach all other segments of society. That project now needs to be conceptualized globally if we are to promote a productive dialogue rather than a destructive clash of civilizations. The censorship and repression of journalism by the remaining old-style dictatorships of the world clearly need to be addressed. And they are. But we also need a parallel project to challenge the control over public space in the United States and elsewhere by huge transnational media corporations. We may have reached the point where the world's single most important political problem is America's telling stories to the rest of the world without hearing the voices and stories of the rest of the world in return. This engenders frustration and resentment outside the United States and a lack of awareness and sensitivity on the part of Americans to how their government's policies affect the rest of the planet.

In Canadian and U.S. arenas, media democratization takes a number of forms. It means building independent media, outside of state and corporate control. It requires critical media education in schools and beyond. It necessitates continual media monitoring and pressing existing dominant media for better quality and more diverse international news, especially from non-Western sources. Opposition to media concentration and foreign ownership must go hand in hand with the demand for structural change and policy reform of media institutions. Media democratization is also dependent on re-invigorating public service broadcasting, while supporting local, non-profit, and community media. It is important to work on media democratization through advocacy groups and movements and to encourage the peace and anti-global corporatization movements to take on the issue of media democratization as crucial to their own goals.

## Notes

- 1 An earlier and more extensive version of this essay was presented under the title “Media and Life-Threatening Conflict: Is the World Wired for Violence?” as the 2003 Dr. Irma Parhad Lecture at the University of Calgary, 24 March 2003.
- 2 Reese Ehrlich, *Target Iraq: What the News Media Didn't Tell You* (New York: Context Books, 2003), 17–18.
- 3 Philip Knightley, *Journalism Studies* (May 2002), 171.
- 4 Robert W. McChesney, in Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan (eds.), *Journalism after September 11* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 91–100.

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## **ON BEING TRAPPED IN THE AMERICAN PARADIGM OF ENDLESS WAR: A PEACE OPTION FOR CANADA<sup>1</sup>**

*George Melnyk*

### **The War Option**

In 2002 I co-edited *Canada and September 11: Impact and Response*. Editing that book convinced me that Canada had entered a serious and very dangerous moment in world history, in which the American paradigm of endless war was the new norm and Canadian foreign relations was its victim. I felt that this new reality had serious repercussions for Canada's distinct civil society and its national identity. In the post-September 11th world, Canada had become identified as a country fully supportive of American imperialist ambition when it gladly sent military forces to invade Afghanistan and overthrow its Taliban regime. At the time, this action was generally applauded by the Canadian population as an appropriate response to the attack on New York's World Trade Center. When the United States continued its imperialist ambitions in 2003 by invading and then occupying Iraq in March and April 2003, Canada refused to join the invading army because the invasion lacked UN support and the public opposition to involvement was significant, particularly in Quebec.

From 1991 (the first attack on Iraq) until 2002 (the invasion of Afghanistan), Canada participated in three American-initiated wars. So why the abrupt about-face in 2003? Had we gone too far in our role as handmaiden? Had the Canadian government reached the proverbial turning point because of its perceived danger in continuing? Or had something else occurred, a new situation arisen? To answer these questions requires dividing the post-World War II Canadian–American relationship on invasions and war into three stages: first prior to 1991, second from 1991 to 2002, and third the current period. Each stage had and continues to have implications for Canadian sovereignty, in particular, and Canadian identity, in general.

From the end of the Korean War (1953), when Canada had joined the United States in a UN-mandated defence of South Korea, until the war to drive Iraq out of Kuwait (1991), Canada did not participate directly in any American military conflict. The Americans fought the Vietnam War for fifteen years, and Canada did not participate other than as a pro-American truce observer. The United States overthrew the elected government of Chile in 1973, defeated the Nicaraguan Revolution in the 1980s, and invaded Grenada and Panama in that same decade, overthrowing their governments, but Canada did not participate. And these regime changes only deal with the Caribbean. The period of the Cold War was one of hot wars between the two superpowers – the United States and the Soviet Union – fought by proxies. While Canada belonged to NATO and was in the anti-Soviet camp, it also showed favour to the Non-Aligned Movement of states that tried to distance themselves from the politics of the Cold War. Since it was the Liberal Party that dominated federal governments from the Korean War to the present, with only two periods of Conservative Party rule, one can conclude that the Liberal Party played an internationalist card in order to give its foreign

policy some wiggle room in the face of American dominance and obsession with communism.

Something changed in 1990, when Iraq invaded Kuwait. Canada gave up over three decades of being a semi-independent voice in international relations, devoted to assisting with UN peacekeeping and working to bring bloody conflicts to an end. When Canada joined the UN-sanctioned war on Iraq in 1991, it began a new identity as a military adjunct of the American empire. Canada became a state associated with military intervention, aggression, and war. Participation in this war undid its identity as a middle power proud of its international status as a peacekeeper. From 1953 to 1991, Canada maintained ongoing economic relations with the United States, but it did not provide military personnel to assist the U.S. In fact, during the Vietnam War, Canada protected those Americans who refused to fight. Since 1991 Canada has gone to war another two times on behalf of the United States – in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, while playing an ongoing naval role in the Gulf region in the post-September 11th U.S. “war on terror.”

There are three major factors responsible for this move to war. The first is the collapse of the Soviet Union and Russian communism in 1991 and the end of the Cold War. The second is the U.S.–Canada free trade agreement of 1988 (FTA), followed by the expanded trilateral (United States, Canada, and Mexico) North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) a few years later. These two factors combine the political and the economic in such a way as to push Canada toward American domination in international affairs. The third factor was the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, which garnered global disapproval and UN condemnation.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the world’s balancing superpower, Canada’s position shifted toward the American side. While the United States and the Soviet Union played an international balancing act, with each power at

either end of the teeter-totter, Canada tried to sit in the middle as much as possible. When the U.S. side became the only superpower, Canada slid inexorably toward the U.S. The space for neutrality created by the Cold War shrank appreciably when the diverse world of competing powers and ideologies came to an end. Up to this point, the United States had been loath to wage war directly using its own forces except in the Americas. Other than Lebanon in 1982 and numerous covert operations like Angola, the United States had, instead, used and supported proxy forces, both state and non-state, to fight for its interests in areas outside of South America and the Caribbean. The post-Soviet Union world of the 1990s, with its unopposed American hegemony, proved to be a magnet pulling Canada into American wars against Iraq, Yugoslavia, and Afghanistan. The military balance of power and nuclear deterrence that had once created a world of moving pieces on a chessboard was gone. The Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites were replaced by the diminished Russian Federation and its NATO-membership and EU-begging former satellites. So Canada found itself face-to-face with a new and threatening geopolitical reality in which there was no real balance to U.S. imperialism.

Canada's integration into the American economy under NAFTA was the second crucial factor pushing Canada toward war. Since the FTA, Canadian exports to the United States have risen to a total of 85 per cent of all exports, while Canada is America's single largest trading partner. The result is dependent production and distribution. Promoted by Canada's business interests and right-wing media, this economic vise has locked Canada into a situation where any attempt at a serious differentiation between the two countries is immediately painted as having negative economic effects on Canadian employment and trade. This was the central focus of the argument denouncing Canada's refusal to invade Iraq in

2003. Because of Canada's dependence on the U.S. economy, the rejection of any integrative measures that the United States demands can turn the border into a problem that has a very serious impact on employment. This economic situation seemed to have sealed our new identity as a supporter of U.S. imperialism around the world, at least until 2003, when Canada's war involvement was obviously reaching a tipping point that the government wanted to avoid.

The third factor that brought Canada into the 1991 war on Iraq (the so-called Gulf War) was its being sanctioned by the UN. With the UN umbrella of Security Council support for driving Iraq from Kuwait, Canada, with its decades-long pro-UN stance, felt it had a perfect excuse to go to war, and since the Americans with their oil interests were keen to ensure the *status quo ante bellum*, the decision was an easy one because no one was asking why this invasion demanded intervention, when other invasions, like those initiated by the Americans in the 1980s, were perfectly fine.

From 1991 to 2002, war was being presented by Canada's right-wing media as a natural condition and something to be proud of. When our "ally" the United States called, we should jump was the message. The media glorified American warrior culture and demanded that Canada emulate it. This was particularly true of the media associated with the pro-American Alliance Party (formerly Reform) position. This position continually harped on Canada's lack of military preparedness for overseas assignments, poor equipment, especially air transport, and inadequate military budgets. It was all part of the pro-American, pro-capitalist, pro-militarist stance of the Canadian Right as it sought to create an American-like society in Canada. According to the Canadian Right, a strong and aggressive military such as that of the United States is the one of the few legitimate activities of the Canadian state (the other is

protection of business interests). The only option that makes business sense, according to them, is the war option.

### **A Brief History of Pro-American War Propaganda**

In the context of our NAFTA dependency, pursuing an alternative peace option has serious economic ramifications, but it also has a strong moral dimension. Of course, morality is often thought to be irrelevant to foreign affairs because the concept of “interests” is considered the guiding reality. But when one listens to the rhetoric of war, one finds innumerable moralistic terms being invoked – freedom, democracy, self-determination, human rights, etc. If the war paradigm can invoke morality, so can the peace paradigm. A peace morality would help Canada redefine itself as a nation in the global community as a country that stands outside American imperialism.

A peace identity is based on the principle that *all human life is of equal value*. By adopting this principle, Canada would ensure a permanent, non-warring stance in the world. The moral principle that all human life is of equal value and that glorifying one human life or group over another is wrong may seem self-evident, but, in a culture of war, it is the opposite view that is most widely held and promoted. In the latest war on Iraq, Canadian media generally ignored Iraqi civilian casualties or turned them into relatively faceless statistics of so many hundreds or thousands killed, while American or British casualties were often named and individualized. This is the public morality of warrior states that individualizes and glorifies its own. This rhetorical morality leads Canadians to regret the death of one Canadian in battle while ignoring or cheering on the death of Canada’s supposed enemies. When four Canadians were killed by U.S. bombing in Afghanistan

in 2002, the media was filled with in-your-face coverage, while the thousands of Afghani casualties were made more or less irrelevant. One Canadian life, as far as Canadians were led to believe, was worth innumerable lives of “the other” – enemy or not.

In the wars that Canada has fought from 1991 to 2002, Iraqis, Yugoslavs, and Afghanis were turned into enemies, although they had never done any harm to Canada. None of these countries had attacked Canada, though some Canadians had died in the World Trade Center attack, and Canada had no substantive geopolitical interests in Iraq, Yugoslavia, or Afghanistan. Endless propaganda encouraged Canadians to support participation in wars that made sense to the Americans because of their interests. Pro-war rhetoric claimed that Canada, as a taken-for-granted ally of the United States, must automatically jump on the war wagon. When the Americans seized control of Baghdad in mid-April 2003, the Canadian media went ballistic with excitement and praise. The Iraqis were war criminals rather than the American and British invaders.

When some human beings are demonized as evil by the media or the state, they are effectively removed from the principle of equality of all human beings. They are no longer human. Since they no longer have lives of equal value to those of “our side,” their death and destruction is acceptable. War is always constructed as an either/or situation and as a life and death struggle no matter how puny the opponent. The horrible things that “our” wars have heaped on Iraqi, Yugoslav, and Afghani civilians are justified and even applauded because the foe is portrayed as evil and a monster. Since people know that war is a brutal reality and a scourge on humankind, political propaganda for war needs to be relentless to overcome our natural reluctance to wage war. The easiest way is to dehumanize the enemy while glorifying our actions as morally superior.

The Americans can do no wrong, the argument goes, so we who help them do no wrong.

War is politics by another name. And politics is about power and not about justice. Justifications for war are numerous, especially when the public needs to be led into accepting war against others as legitimate and necessary. The resources of a state in mobilizing public opinion against someone or some group are simply immense. In wartime, all the other problems associated with political leaders are forgotten and their role and identity is turned into something beyond reproach. If political rhetoric and propaganda is not enough, then the state will impose censorship so that only its message of unchallenged patriotism is heard. This message is filled with the binary logic of war in which there are only good guys and bad guys. “They” are the black monsters, and “we” are the knights in shining armour. This attitude leads people to consider the killing of others, however many, as something good or, at minimum, necessary. None of the three countries attacked in part by Canada in 1991, 1999, and 2002 was ever a threat to Canada; yet we attacked them all the same because the Americans had designated them as evil.

If Canada had rejected war and embraced the peace option in 1991, 1999, and 2002, it would have said that it does not buy into the devaluing of human beings by war propaganda. It would have said that it accepts the equal value of all human life, whatever its nationality, race, or religion. It would have made a further political statement that it does not attack other countries unless it is attacked. Embracing offensive war, as Canada did between 1991 and 2002, undermined the concept of the Canadian military as a defensive force.

A review of the American-led wars that Canada joined (it would never have initiated them itself because of its lack of power) is a stark reminder of how the logic of war works. In 1991 Canada joined the United States in an attack on Iraq,

which had threatened American control of Middle East oil by invading Kuwait, a dependency of the United States. Canada is not dependent on Middle East oil, so it had no “interest” there other than the claim that it was upholding the authority of the Security Council that authorized a show of force to make Iraq quit Kuwait. Not only did the Coalition’s bombing devastate Iraq and cause substantial civilian deaths, the massacre of retreating Iraqi soldiers by American forces is one of the war crimes of the late twentieth century. While Coalition casualties in that war were only a few hundred, half of them from friendly fire, figures for the Iraqi side vary from 30,000 to 100,000 and more. This was basically a bloodbath on the scale of British imperial wars of the nineteenth century against poorly armed opponents. In those days, like today, the deaths on the other side were accepted as normal and perfectly valid.

In 1999 Canada increased its war participation on behalf of the United States by bombing Yugoslavia. This time, there was no United Nations excuse, so Canada played the NATO card. The war was promoted as a war to stop genocide in Kosovo. There was expulsion, an attempt at ethnic cleansing, but no genocide, just the well-oiled propaganda machine of the United States. What was the politics here? It was the politics of ending the rule of the last socialist in Europe, which it did. In the process, over a thousand Yugoslavs died, and Kosovars today are still dying from the cluster bombs that the Americans left behind. But nobody in our society mourns these deaths. Instead we were asked to cheer “our boys” as they bombed and strafed an enemy that didn’t have the power to shoot down one enemy plane and in 1999 didn’t even have enough fuel to remove its troops and vehicles from Kosovo.

In 2002 Canada again went to war on behalf of the United States. This time, we attacked Afghanistan. Instead of Canadian naval power in the Gulf War and air power in the Yugoslav war, we upped the ante by using ground troops in

Afghanistan. In doing so, we became party to the American violation of human rights and the Geneva Convention on treatment of prisoners of war. We stood behind the United States as it killed over three thousand Afghani civilians in its bombing, and Canada said nothing. We also supported the Americans in the war crime of butchering Taliban prisoners, either directly or through their Northern Alliance allies. The most infamous case was the massacre of prisoners at Mazar-I-Sharif, when hundreds were mowed down. The fight against al-Qaeda was the excuse for barbaric and inhuman treatment of others. If what had been done by the Americans to their opponents (hooding, drugging, and imprisoning in cages) had been done to Americans, there would be a horrendous outcry of barbarism. But doing it to the other side was just fine. This is what happens when you buy into the war option, when you say that the enemy is evil and his life should be extinguished and that whatever we do is acceptable.

How many Canadians cared about the innumerable deaths brought on Iraq by American-forced United Nations sanctions from 1991 to 2003? Very few. These figures are comparable to half a million Canadians being killed. Surely this is a monstrous figure that horrifies us when applied to us. But when applied to Iraqis we are taught to just shrug. We have been taught to consider all and every action against Iraq as moral, civilized, and proper. It is the Iraqi side that is monstrous, not us.

In 2003 Canada said that that the second war on Iraq was wrong because the United Nations had not approved it. It did not say it was evil and motivated by imperialist designs. It did not adopt a moral anti-war principle. It did nothing to have the invasion condemned once it began, and the Liberal government even asked the public and its party members to refrain from criticizing the U.S. invasion so as not to harm relations.

Canada's non-participation in the 2003 Iraq war could be considered a major shift away from the war paradigm, but that

would be a false appraisal. Canada's decision was based on four distinct factors. First, it offered the United States thousands of Canadian troops to assist with the occupation of Afghanistan as a substitute for its failure to join the invasion of Iraq – an offer that was readily accepted with the result that now three thousand Canadian troops are now pacifying the country and propping up the American-sanctioned government. Second, it continued to provide naval support in the Gulf for the “war on terror.” Third, it was bolstered by the opposition of most of the world plus the UN Security Council that gave the Canadian government enough backbone to say no to participation. Fourth, Canadian public opinion was against participation initially and even after the war was launched a small overall majority supported non-participation. In Quebec the figures against the war and involvement were very high, and with a Quebec provincial election during the war, the federal government's stance boosted the electoral chances of the provincial Liberals. When the federal government was put on the defensive for its non-participation by the attacks of pro-American English Canadian media and interest groups, plus American officials, it did not condemn American and British imperialism, just as the UN did not.

### **The Peace Option**

How would a peace option affect Canada's role in the world community? Let's take the case of Afghanistan. If Canada had sent three thousand people to help to rebuild civil society in that country, instead of sending three thousand soldiers, we would have been a shining example of a new moral stance in the world. If we had worked to build roads, schools, and electrical and medical facilities in an impoverished country, Canada would have become a symbol of hope in international

relations. While the Americans continue their “imperialism lite” occupation, no country is making a serious effort to rebuild Afghanistan. Because we don’t care about building a civil society in Afghanistan, opium production has return to pre-Taliban levels. Some even say that the United States wants opium production to increase because it encourages drug addiction in Iran and Pakistan. It’s what British imperialism did in China a hundred years ago.

If we had said that the Iraqi people, the Yugoslavs, and the Afghans were human beings of equal value to us, as the peace option claims, then their deaths and destruction would be as unacceptable as our own. We would stop participating in endless American wars. To establish the peace option in Canada, Canadians must first require that its government stop going to war every time the Americans do. With a military force of 1.3 million men and women, near invincibility in military technology, and a war budget exceeding that of the next fifteen countries combined, the United States does not need our military effort except for political reasons. Public opposition to the war on Iraq was a factor in keeping Canada out of war in 2003 because the public read the invasion of Iraq as the same as the invasion of Kuwait. Canadians must further demand that our government stand up for human rights and conventions for international conduct. This would mean more than not going to war. It would mean condemning the United States for its war crimes and its imperialism.

If we are to be seen as objective and just, we must not be seen as apologists for American war crimes and actions, silently tolerating inexcusable conduct.

Canadians must also insist that our government provide alternative forms of action to that of war. When an all-powerful nation like the United States says to the world that either you are for us or you are against us, Canada must reject this intimidation. This division of the world into friend or foe

is exactly what the paradigm of war is all about. The peace option values diversity and rejects political monocultures. The Canadian Government needs to improve the climate of international relations today by returning to its former, and now tarnished, peacekeeper image so that it can be counted as a partner in rebuilding war-torn societies. Canadians cannot depend on Canadian business or media or government to make this happen. We have to do it ourselves as citizens concerned about what is happening to our country.

The argument that Canada cannot embrace the peace option because we are dependent on a warrior state for our economic survival is a very powerful one. It appeals to all classes in society from the blue-collar truck driver crossing the border with branch plant products to the businessman on Bay Street watching the NYSE. Economic integration has made the war option the logical one for Canada because it touches on employment and profits. It is economic integration that is the rope (some might say the noose) that binds us to American wars. It is this rope that must be unraveled, slowly, carefully, and inexorably, if the peace option is to ever become a cornerstone of Canadian foreign policy.

## **A Peace Boycott**

Canadians need to launch an economic boycott of the United States until such time as that country drops the paradigm of endless war, which may be a very long time indeed. Through a boycott Canadians will educate themselves about how completely linked our two economies have become. No more buying of American automobiles and other American corporate products and brandname items, nor shopping at American chains in Canada. It would mean no travel to the United States. It would mean no more buying of California

vegetables or fruit. In short it would mean no more business dealings by individual Canadians with the American economy. This would result in hardship and increased costs to Canadians who participate. But it is the only way in which we can rid ourselves of the American economic addiction – an addiction that has led us to participate in American wars.

I am proposing a Gandhi-inspired model in which the supporters of a boycott bring hardship upon themselves. Even if every Canadian joined the boycott, the economic impact on the United States would be modest, while the economic impact on Canadians would be massive, even revolutionary. Only if citizens in other countries joined in this boycott would the United States pay some economic attention, and the possibility of that happening is very slim, if non-existent. But the political message of a boycott would be powerful threat to the United States. Boycott U.S.A. would affirm Canadian independence and the peace option in international affairs.

Because a majority of the Canadian public has been convinced of the value of the U.S. relation, the supporters of an economic boycott would be a tiny minority. So the impact of the boycott on the United States would be marginal, if any, unless of course the boycott became a popular movement. Boycott U.S.A. would have to view itself as a moral movement whose profile in the Canadian consciousness would be greater than its economic impact because of its principles. The movement would have four organized levels, as well as an unorganized level. The unorganized level involves anyone who wishes to boycott the United States economically to as little or great a degree as they privately desire. The organized levels include the lowest level of associate boycotters, who support the movement but participate in an informal and ad hoc manner, picking and choosing what they wish to boycott. The level above associate are the “lite” boycotters, who adhere to a program that has the least hardship associated with it. The next level is the “regu-

lar” boycott, while the highest level is “total” boycott. The movement would set the standards for each level of boycott and support people involved in a variety of formal ways. The movement would also promote the peace boycott concept nationally and establish mechanisms to assist people by providing information on American products, services, and companies while offering alternative non-American sources and group support. The boycott would not preclude other activities to end Canada’s participation in the American war machine.

Participation in Boycott U.S.A. reminds Canadians how easily we have been drawn into the dark crusade of ever more war, murder, destruction, and even annihilation. If Canada is to regain its former peacemaker role, it needs a population that is active in resisting war, and Boycott U.S.A. is a fundamental expression of a new direction. Just as our participation in American wars has weakened Canada’s ability to represent alternatives to war, a failure to provide alternatives encourages more war and human suffering. If Canada had accepted the principle of every life being of equal value as public policy, we would be one of the few nations in the world on the path of creating peaceful reconciliation. We cannot expect the state or capitalism or the media to embrace the peace option. This is an initiative of the citizenry – as were the great anti-war demonstrations of February and March 2003. These demonstrations did not stop the invasion and conquest of Iraq nor the culture of endless war that the U.S. government embraces, but they did show that only people, inside and outside the United States, can offer an alternative that is just and peaceful. Boycott U.S.A. would show Canadians and the many Americans opposed to war-mongering that democracy is strengthened by peaceful opposition. In the end, working for the peace option makes Canadians stronger as individuals and as a nation. In terms of Canadian sovereignty, the peace option is the only patriotic alternative.

## Notes

- 1 This article is based on a presentation made at the *Trading in Violence/Building for Peace: Challenging the Corporate State*, Annual Parkland Institute Conference, University of Alberta, 15 November 2002. It has been expanded, updated, and revised to take into account the invasion of Iraq in 2003.