

Introduction

In the fall of 1963 I arrived in Saskatoon to begin teaching in the Department of Economics and Political Science at the University of Saskatchewan. I had quit my job as a member of the US Foreign Service after a two-year assignment in the Department of State. It had been a very interesting time. With a top-secret security clearance I saw the inside workings of the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Cuban missile crisis, how the US government manouvered to undermine the government of Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, the machinations of the Kennedy Administration in Latin America and of course the decision to undertake a major role in the Vietnam civil war. But I also learned that I did not want to be one of the diplomats who “go abroad and lie for your country,” as Metternich put it.

I arrived at the University of Saskatchewan just as the Vietnam War took off as a major political issue. It fit into my teaching and writing agenda. Under the influence of my senior colleague, Vernon Fowke, I began to specialize in the political economy of Canadian-American relations. I also taught a senior course in Canadian foreign and defence policy. I wrote extensively on these topics, gave lectures, produced papers and engaged in political activity.

But I also had a second major interest, agriculture and food and rural development. When I began teaching at the University of Regina in 1986 I was fortunate to be able to combine my teaching and research efforts in both areas. Based in the Department of Sociology and Social Studies, I taught sociology, rural sociology and development. But I also taught in the Department of Political Science. My specialty there was a second-year course on the political economy of continentalism, required of all political science majors. After I retired the department abolished the course, a sign of the times. Occasionally, I also taught Canadian foreign policy and international politics. My research shifted to the political economy of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan politics and environmental and Green politics.

The most important political issue in Canada since 2001 is clearly the increased integration of Canada into “Fortress North America” and the support that the Canadian government has given to the “war against terrorism” declared by the US administration of George W. Bush. With strong backing from the leadership and congressional branch of the Democratic Party, the people of the United States are presented with no political alternative to increased military spending, increased militarism, the expanded national security state and war and intervention around the world. In Canada both the Liberal government headed by Paul Martin and then the Conservative government of Stephen Harper embraced increased continental integration and direct military support for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Yet public

opinion has strongly opposed participation in the Iraq war and over the past year at least a plurality in various polls want Canada to end its counterinsurgency role in Afghanistan.

In the face of this public opposition, the Harper government, our business leadership, the political elite and the mass media have responded with a major campaign to try to convince the Canadian public that they are wrong. In the past the military in Canada were considered a part of the civil service and did not engage in public debate over policy. But this has now changed. Our military leaders are deeply involved in the general political campaign to support the war in Afghanistan. They also wanted Canada to join the United States in the war on Iraq.

In 2006 I became quite annoyed with this campaign and its distortion of history. Furthermore, there was no recognition of the motives for US policy in Afghanistan: the Carter Doctrine of using military intervention to protect US control of the oil in the Middle East, the goal of preventing Russia and China from gaining a foothold in the oil industry in the Middle East and since around 1990, the goal of gaining access and control of the oil and gas resources around the Caspian Sea. The proposed oil and gas pipelines across Afghanistan by Union Oil Corporation of California (Unocal) and its corporate allies has been an important part of this agenda. In my research on the oil and gas industry in Saskatchewan, access to the newly discovered resource around the Caspian Sea kept coming up.

So I shifted my research, and in the fall of 2006 wrote two articles, one on how and why Canada got involved in the Afghan and Iraq wars and the other on the importance of the oil issue to understanding why there is a war in Afghanistan. At the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences in May 2007 in Saskatoon I discussed this with Wayne Antony and Errol Sharpe of Fernwood Publishing. I have known them for quite some time. They proposed that I write a short popular book outlining the key issues on Afghanistan, why the counterinsurgency war is not working, why there is so little support for the US-installed Afghan government and why Canada is so deeply involved. Over the summer I did more research and decided to take on the project.

One final note, recognizing a contribution from my father. On quite a few occasions he made the remark about British imperialism: “Why is it that the sun never sets on the British Empire? You can’t trust the bastards after dark.” Then he would sometimes add: “The British will fight to the last Australian.” I remembered this when I read a news story that quoted a supposed Taliban fighter in Helmand province: “I don’t care that much about the Americans or the Canadians. We are going after the British, for this is the third time they have invaded our country.”

Canadian leaders who were so anxious to get involved in the US war

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in Afghanistan seemed completely unaware of the history of that country. Afghans have fought hard against all foreign occupying forces. The Russians had the advantages of high-tech modern warfare yet they were unable to defeat a guerilla army of resistance. As Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang have recounted in *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar*, it was the blind determination of our political leaders to loyally serve the interests of the US government that led to the major commitment to fight a counterinsurgency war in Afghanistan.

Much of what really happened in the build up to the Afghan war and the impact of the war on the people of Afghanistan is unknown by most Canadians. It has been ignored by our mass media, including the CBC. The mass media in North America has given uncritical support to the US attack on Afghanistan and to NATO's role there in support of US policy. Chapter 1 provides the basic information on the US decision to go to war rather than seek to arrest and bring to court the perpetrators of the 9/11 assault. It also provides some indication of the horrors of the massive air assaults that are the norm for US military policy. Our journalists, "embedded" in the Canadian military when they go to Afghanistan, present a very limited picture of what is actually happening. They never provide us with photos of the damage done to local villages by our military assaults. They never provide us with photos of those civilians who are killed and wounded.

The justification for the regime change in Afghanistan was that it is a failed state and needs to be straightened out by the Western powers. In Chapter 2 I point out the extent of the poverty and the destruction from the twenty-five years of war. But the model for development being imposed on the people of Afghanistan cannot bring about the needed changes.

Afghanistan is an attempt to create a modern nation-state from a territory carved out of the historic Persian, Indian and central Asian civilizations. In spite of being one of the least-developed countries in the world, the Afghans were moving to create a democratic government and a secular state. This effort was undermined by the intervention of the US and Soviet governments. Chapter 3 outlines this history.

Over the past few years a number of scholars have praised the United States for taking on the role of the world's dominant empire. Michael Ignatieff is one of them. While the United States is seen as the benevolent world power imposing liberalism on failed states, others see this as a new version of classical imperialism. Chapter 4 describes the buildup of the US military machine, the construction of the justification of humanitarian intervention and the US focus on controlling world oil and gas resources. The intervention in Afghanistan is part of this geopolitical strategy.

The invasion and occupation of Afghanistan was justified by the attack on the United States on September 11, 2001. This event launched the of-

ficial war on terrorism. But few today want to recognize the role of the U.S. government in creating and promoting the Islamist revival. Nor do they want to discuss the role of the US government in creating al Qaeda during the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan. These CIA “assets” were central to the attack on 9/11. I have summarized this in Chapter 5.

People in North America generally have little knowledge of the government of Afghanistan. Why is the Karzai government so unpopular? Why is the insurgency spreading? Our government officials and the mass media present a very distorted version of what is happening in Afghanistan. In Chapter 6 I try to give an indication of why this government is so unpopular. It is anything but a democratic government.

The US government cited the misogynist nature of the Taliban government as an excuse to launch a war of humanitarian intervention. But in fact the troubles that women have in Afghanistan are a direct result of the massive support that the US government gave to the Islamic fundamentalists during the war of insurgency against the communist government. There was no criticism of the vicious mujahideen government, in office between 1992 and 1996. There was no recognition of US government and corporate support for the Taliban regime. There is very little said about the status of women under the government of Hamid Karzai. I have covered this in Chapter 7. It should be noted that the Canadian government followed in lock step with the US government on this issue.

Canada has played a key role in Afghanistan as the loyal ally of the US government. The details of this commitment are outlined in Chapter 8. During the Cold War Canada was the special ally of the United States, and this has not changed under the “new world order” of the unipolar world. The closer economic integration with the United States under the free-trade agreements seems to have created an additional barrier to implementing any kind of independent foreign policy. Recent governments have had to deal with their desire to support US policy while the Canadian public has been skeptical if not in opposition.

The concluding chapter looks at the possible alternatives. I have put the emphasis on what the Afghan people want. They have been denied almost any say in political, military and economic developments since 2001. The political establishment in Canada insists that there is no alternative to supporting US policy and continuing the present military strategy in Afghanistan. There is evidence that this position is not supported by the majority of Canadians. The question is how do we convince our political parties and our government that a change is desired. This requires political mobilization by Canadians.

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