

A tale of two war criminals: Bush and Clinton do Toronto

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When you accuse anyone of war crimes, you'd better be sure you have the evidence to back it up; such an accusation is the equivalent of yelling "fire" in a crowded shopping mall.

It's a serious charge, something that sits heavily on our psyche as fragile human beings who generally tend to disbelieve that any one could be capable of committing crimes against humanity, especially if they have elected him president.

Perhaps that's why such a presidential event as a "conversation" between George W. Bush and Bill Clinton happened in Toronto, Canada on May 29, 2009 — the event was [billed as a "conversation,"](#) [2] maybe because the terms "meeting of the minds" or "great intellectual debate" would embarrass one of the two parties involved?).

The two men got a standing ovation from a packed audience that paid from \$200 to over \$2,000 a ticket at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre.

Yes, that's right, a standing ovation from the crowd inside the Convention Centre. And both Presidents got paid for their time. While no one is telling how much each ex-President made off the 90 minute conversation, Bush reportedly received (US) \$160,000 for his last appearance in Canada, in Calgary Alberta in March 2009. Clinton can charge up to (US) \$350,000 per speaking engagement. Good work if you can get it.

But ask the 500 or so protesters across the street from the Convention Centre, organized by [the Toronto Coalition to Stop the War](#) [3], and the only standing up the presidents got were erect middle fingers. It was this side third and uninvited side of the conversation that chanted slogans such as "Bush and Clinton, war criminals: shame on you!"

Here are a few of the numerous examples of war crimes committed by each of the two men.

Bush as a war criminal

Bush is accused of numerous war crimes, resulting from him ignoring his own constitution's "supremacy clause," Article II, section 4, and the War Crimes Act of 1996 (18USC §2441).

Regarding the United States' War Crimes Acts, author [Mike Ferner from Veterans for Peace](#) [4], writes: "To give just a snapshot of how serious these laws are, consider this portion of 18 USC 2441 which defines a war crime as '... a grave breach in any of the international

conventions signed at Geneva 12 August 1949, or any protocol to such convention to which the United States is a party ...' The guilty can be '... fined under this title or imprisoned for life or any term of years, or both, and if death results to the victim, shall also be subject to the penalty of death.'"

Not to mention important international treaties and conventions such as the Geneva Conventions, the Nuremberg rulings, the Laws and Customs of War on Land and UN General Assembly Resolution 3314. Breaches of these international treaties and conventions amounting to war crimes are too numerous to mention here (though they are listed at [the website War Criminals Out](#) [5], which has lists of charges and broken resolutions.)

The invasion of Iraq is cited as a prime example of Bush's war crimes, where activists insist Bush should be charged under the UN Resolution 3314, Article 5 (codified from [the principles of Nuremberg concerning "Wars of Aggression,"](#) [6] which cites as an historical example Hitler's invasion of Poland) for committing a "crime against peace." The invasion of Iraq is thus considered a war crime and a crime against humanity, which is spelled out in detail in [the Geneva Conventions](#) [7].

In Iraq alone, Ferner points out that Bush is responsible for, among other things, "illegally invading a sovereign state, using banned weapons such as white phosphorous and napalm, bombing hospitals and civilian infrastructure, withholding aid and medical supplies, terrorizing and knowingly killing civilians, torturing prisoners, killing a million people and displacing 4 million more in Iraq alone."

Now, we're talking big crimes here, a big fire someone should point out to the general public.

Clinton as a war criminal

While Clinton's presidency might enjoy a different reputation (think blue dress), there's a case to be made regarding his culpability in committing war crimes. He was not the focus of the demo, but I don't think he should get a free pass. Again, using the same international conventions and treaties listed above, there's a list of actions to consider in regards to charging him with war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Clinton imposed, through the UN Security Council, sanctions on Iraq between 1990 and 2003, which had a devastating effect on the Iraqi population. The [UN, in 1999, reported](#) [8] more than hundreds of thousands of Iraqis died as a result of the sanctions, disproportionately among children.

On June 26, 1993, [the Clinton administration bombed Baghdad](#) [9] in retaliation for an alleged but unproven Iraq plot to assassinate former President George Bush, Sr.

Clinton's administration and NATO conducted the bombing campaign of Serbia from March 22 to June 11, 1999 without UN Security Council approval, [against the rules of the Geneva Conventions](#) [10].

Again, big fire here! Not only should Bush and Clinton's actions translate into war crimes charges, but their disregard for not only American law but also international treaties and conventions undermines the rule of international law and undermines the consensus of the international community.

And we're not even talking torture charges against Bush regarding his country's treatment of foreign nationals at military and CIA run prisons, military or rendition sites around the world, [an obvious breach](#) [11] of the Geneva Conventions. Reports from Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay alone might be enough to prosecute Bush and win convictions.

These reasons alone were enough to compel the group [Lawyers Against The War](#) [12] to issue [this statement](#) [13] to the RCMP on March 12, 2009, asking that Bush be denied entry into Canada under Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (section 35(1)(a)), because Bush is a war criminal (Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes Act (CAHWC)).

War crimes in World Court

The latest rumour regarding actually holding Bush and his administration accountable for war crimes comes from Spain, where [Harper's reports](#) [14] that the Spanish press *El País* and *Público* state, "the Spanish national security court has opened a criminal probe focusing on Bush Administration lawyers who pioneered the descent into torture at the prison in Guantánamo."

This could be the first step of bringing the Commander and Chief himself before an international court if the lawyers claim they were just following orders.

Is prosecuting the leaders enough?

While I am certainly not against using international criminal courts to prosecute political leaders with war crimes, I believe their function and scope to be too limiting to bring about real justice to victims of crimes against humanity. The problem with any war crimes court stems from the fact that, as prosecution goes, the international community at best gets to nail one of two ringleaders with convictions but leaves the functioning war machine or war bureaucracy untouched, the unknown number of faceless bureaucrats and military personnel untouched.

While we get a vicarious sense of justice because we got the top brass, those big arrests give the media permission to declare justice complete and us permission to move on to the next conflict of the day. And by "us," I mostly mean the Western world, as if prosecuting international, political criminals has become a judicial white man's burden.

This assumed distance can also amount to a coolly calculated mood of international NIMBY and moral superiority, where one nation can quickly vilify another by pointing out the atrocities committed in that country while claiming such crimes could never occur in their own.

It also assumes a stance of culpability after the fact. Regarding Iraq, the American public needs to look inwards to whether domestically they did enough to prevent the events of Iraq from occurring in the first place.

But can we as Canadians sit so smugly with the notion that we did not invade Iraq, or that it was the progressive Left that kept Canada out of Iraq and therefore we have clean hands and the permission to look the other way. Can we point to Bush and Clinton, two American presidents, and declare their country the new international fixture of Evil while in contrast considering ourselves the good guys?

Instead of sitting on our presumed laurels and pointing to our deified notion of

peacekeeping, perhaps we should be more aware of our own actions, non-actions and culpability in global and domestic affairs. Everything from Rwanda, Darfur, Sri Lanka to the treatment of our aboriginal citizens.

If Americans need to look inward to understand their own heart of darkness, then we must demand that we as Canadians do the same.

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