

Afghanistan and Iraq: it's the Same War

By [David Orchard](#) and [Michael Mandel](#)

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Four years ago the U.S. and Britain unleashed war on Iraq, a nearly defenseless Third World country barely half the size of Saskatchewan.

For twelve years prior to the invasion and occupation Iraq had endured almost weekly U.S. and British bombing raids and the toughest sanctions in history, the “primary victims” of which, according to the UN Secretary General, were “women and children, the poor and the infirm.” According to UNICEF, half a million children died from sanctions related starvation and disease.

Then, in March 2003, the U.S. and Britain — possessors of more weapons of mass destruction than the rest of the world combined — attacked Iraq on a host of fraudulent pretexts, with cruise missiles, napalm, white phosphorous, cluster and bunker buster bombs and depleted uranium (DU) munitions.

The British Medical Journal *The Lancet* published a study last year estimating Iraqi war deaths since 2003 at 655,000, a mind-boggling figure dismissed all-too readily by the British and American governments despite widespread scientific approval for its methodology (including the British government’s own chief scientific adviser).

On April 11, 2007, the Red Cross issued a report entitled “Civilians without Protection: the ever-worsening humanitarian crisis in Iraq.” Citing “immense suffering,” it calls “urgently” for “respect for international humanitarian law.” Andrew White, Anglican Vicar of Baghdad added, “What we see on our television screens does not demonstrate even one per cent of the reality of the atrocity of Iraq...”

The UN estimates two million Iraqis have been “internally displaced,” while another two million have fled — largely to neighbouring Syria and Jordan, overwhelming local infrastructure.

An attack such as that on Iraq, neither in self-defence nor authorized by the United Nations Security Council is, in the words of the Nuremberg Tribunal that condemned the Nazis, “the supreme international crime.” According to the Tribunal’s chief prosecutor, US Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson, such a war is simply mass murder.

Most Canadians are proud that Canada refused to invade Iraq. But when it comes to Afghanistan, we hear the same jingoistic bluster we heard about Iraq four years ago. As if Iraq and Afghanistan were two separate wars, and Afghanistan is the good war, the legal

and just war.

In reality, Iraq and Afghanistan are the *same* war.

That's how the Bush administration has seen Afghanistan from the start; not as a defensive response to 9/11, but the opening for regime change in Iraq (as documented in Richard A. Clarke's *Against all Enemies*). That's why the Security Council resolutions of September 2001 never mention Afghanistan, much less authorize an attack on it. That's why the attack on Afghanistan was also a supreme international crime, which killed at least 20,000 innocent civilians in its first six months. The Bush administration used 9/11 as a pretext to launch an open-ended so-called "War on Terror" — in reality a war *of* terror because it kills hundreds of times more civilians than the other terrorists do.

That the Karzai regime was subsequently set up under UN auspices doesn't absolve the participants in America's war, and that includes Canada. Nor should the fact that Canada now operates under the UN authorized International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mislead anyone. From the start, ISAF put itself at the service of the American operation, declaring "the United States Central Command will have authority over the International Security Assistance Force" (UNSC Document S/2001/1217). When NATO took charge of ISAF that didn't change anything. NATO forces are always ultimately under US command. The "Supreme Commander" is always an American general, who answers to the American president, not the Afghan one.

Canadian troops in Afghanistan not only take orders from the Americans, they help free up more American forces to continue their bloody occupation of Iraq.

When the U.S. devastated Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (1961-1975), leaving behind six million dead or maimed, Canada refused to participate. But today Canada has become part of a U.S. war being waged not only in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also in a network of disclosed and undisclosed centres of physical and mental torture, like Guantanamo Bay in — let's not forget — illegally occupied Cuban territory. And what we know about what the U.S. government calls terrorism is that it is largely a response to foreign occupation, and what we know about American occupation is that it is a way the rich world forces the rest to surrender their resources.

General Rick Hillier bragged that Canada was going to root out the "scumbags" in Afghanistan. He didn't mention that the Soviets, using over 600,000 troops and billions in aid over ten years, were unable to control Afghanistan. Britain, at the height of its imperial power, tried twice and failed. Now, Canada is helping another fading empire attempt to impose its will on Afghanistan.

Canadians have traditionally been able to hold their heads high when they travel the world. We did not achieve that reputation by waging war against the world's poor; in large part we achieved it by refusing to do so.

Canada must — immediately, and at the minimum — open its doors to Iraqis and Afghans attempting to flee the horror being inflicted on their homelands. We must stop pretending that we're not implicated in their suffering under the bombs, death squads and torture. This means refusing to lend our name, our strength and the blood of our youth in this war without end against the Third World.

David Orchard is the author of The Fight for Canada: Four Centuries of Resistance to American Expansionism and ran twice for the leadership of the Progressive Conservative party. He farms at Borden, SK and can be reached at tel 306-652-7095, davidorchard@sasktel.net www.davidorchard.com

Michael Mandel is Professor of International Law at York University, Osgoode Hall Law School in Toronto and author of How America Gets Away With Murder: Illegal Wars, Collateral Damage and Crimes Against Humanity. He can be reached at tel 416-736-5039, MMandel@osgoode.yorku.ca .

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