

Canada's Secret War: IRAQ - Ten Years After "Shock and Awe"

Global Research News Hour Episode 19

By [Michael Welch](#), [Richard Sanders](#), and [Hans von Sponeck](#)
Global Research, March 25, 2013

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)
Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [GLOBAL RESEARCH NEWS HOUR](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)
In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Iraq War, the Global Research News Hour interviews Richard Sanders of the Coalition Opposed to the Arms Trade (COAT) about the myth of Canada's non-involvement in Iraq.

There is a follow-up interview with former UN Humanitarian Coordinator Hans Von Sponeck about the deterioration of the social conditions in Iraq from before the 1991 Gulf War to the present and the potential for redress against these and future war crimes.

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Transcript- Richard Sanders Interview, March 21, 2013

Intro

March 19th marks the tenth anniversary of the day the US military and its allies began the offensive against Iraq known as Operation Iraqi freedom.

The military campaign that ensued coming on top of more than ten years of sanctions devastated the country and is estimated to have killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians as well as thousands of coalition troops, including over 4000 US troops.

Jean Chretien, prime minister at the time of the Iraq war has received praise for keeping Canada out of the Iraq war. A closer examination, however, reveals that far from withdrawing from that conflict, Canada actively supported it.

Ottawa-based Richard Sanders, coordinator of the Coalition Opposed to the Arms Trade, an anti-war group, has outlined in detail the ways in which Canada supported the Iraq war. He joins us now to explain his analysis.

Michael Welch: Well, Canada did not become an official member of the coalition of the willing, but yet Canada did, according to your research do quite a lot to support the war in Iraq. Could you maybe list off some of the ways that Canada was involved in that war?

Richard Sanders: Yeah, for sure, because we were very involved in many different ways. Okay, well one of the ways which we were involved was through our navy. We often hear that we didn't have that many boots on the ground, that we didn't have much of an army participation, and that seems to be the one and only criteria by which many people in the mainstream media want to decide whether Canada was involved, how many army people did we have on the ground.

So but Canadian participation through the navy was quite significant, we had thousands of people aboard numerous multi-billion dollar frigates and a destroyer that were involved in leading and protecting and supplying the coalition navy in the initial invasion in 2003, as well as many times since over the years. We also did have army generals, Canadian army generals, there were three different Canadian generals who held command positions leading the entire war, they were deputy commanders, so number two in command of the Iraq war. There were three of them and they each spent a year to a year and a half in Iraq. There was another Canadian general who led a US base where they trained thousands of us soldiers and sent them off to war in Iraq. We provided war planners which helped to organize the strategy for the wars, once it started.

Michael Welch: -the logistics?

Richard Sanders: ...we helped conduct the air war, so we had can pilots and crew aboard these kinds of aircraft that coordinated the air strikes. It's like a traffic controller- air traffic controllers- except instead of being in a tower, they're in an air craft, which is like especially designed to coordinate all the different fighters and bombers. We provided airspace and re-fuelling for the US, thousands of US planes that were going to and from Iraq over the years since the war started. So, we basically let the US fly over our airspace, land in our airports in Newfoundland—two of them, possibly three, and then refuel there and then take off for the rest of the trip. We provided some air transport for the war, so we had C130 aircraft, with Canadian pilots flying US troops and their weapons into and out of Iraq. By taking over in Afghanistan, which we did, from the US, we helped free up US troops. We did supply some ground troops; three, four, five dozen troops at least...

Michael Welch: —was that part of-?

Richard Sanders: ...on the ground. So there are some of the ways, but there are quite a few other ways. One of the ways I'll just quickly mention is through the Canadian arms trade. We sell, Canada sells, 5-7.5 billion dollars of military equipment per year, every year, and 75% of that goes to the United States. In my research I found that about forty, at least forty different major US weapons systems that were used in Iraq, all of the major war planes for example, used in Iraq, have very important Canadian components. So these war planes, fighters and bombers that conducted the air strikes against Iraq, they would not have been able to do their missions unless they had the Canadian components in them, and there are quite a few other ways as well that we helped support. By training Iraqi police, training Iraqi troops, providing RADARSAT data, so we have this billion dollar satellite system orbiting the earth and it provides data for US weapons system. We facilitate US weapons training, testing in Canada, so they test their weapons systems that they used in Iraq, they tested them in Canada. So those are some of the ways that Canada was involved, and I think that pretty much proves that Canada was involved. I mean it's pretty hard to deny it, there were

so many ways that we were involved, I think it's incredible that they can say "Canada was not involved, or Canada sat out the war, isn't it great". We're asked to celebrate how Canada didn't get involved. Well, we did get involved, we were very involved, and I find it really incredibly mind-blowing that they can pretend, they can put up this phony official narrative that says that we weren't involved— we were so deeply involved. Very few other countries were as involved in Canada I mean, obviously the United States and Britain were more involved than we were. Australia had quite a few troops there, but they didn't provide all these other things which Canada provided.

Michael Welch: Well if you include all the various ways in which Canada did help, I mean, where would we rank among the so-called coalition of the willing, did we actually contribute more than some who were listed amongst the coalition of the willing?

Richard Sanders: Oh, absolutely. We provided more than almost everyone in the whole world, I mean other than the US, Britain, and Australia, I think that a very good case can be made that Canada provided more than any country except for those three. So, I'd say we were at least in the top five. Now, it's interesting the whole issue of the Coalition of the Willing, because when that was announced on March 18 2003, Secretary David Colin Powell said "We now have a coalition of the willing who have publicly said they could be included in such a listing". And then he said, quote: "there are fifteen other nations, who, for one reason or another, do not wish to be publicly named, but will be supporting the coalition", unquote. So in other words, the coalition of the willing is just a list of the countries that were participating in one way or another and were willing to publicly say that they were involved. And then he says, very clearly, that there are fifteen other countries that do not want to be publicly named but they were supporting the coalition. So Canada was obviously part of that group, they did not want to be publicly named as part of the coalition of the willing, so they were unwilling to be named as part of the coalition of the willing, but they were very willing to be involved.

Michael Welch: Now, you mention a lot of various ways in which Canada was involved, you did mention a few dozen people—boots on the ground—were there were actually Canadian soldiers there in Iraq, in a combat capacity... how was that possible when the official line was "We aren't sending soldiers to Iraq?"

Richard Sanders: Okay, that's done through having these soldiers working under the command of British or American forces, so they're kind of on—it's called an exchange—so it's the same way that we had pilots flying US warplanes during the war. Flying, for example these massive transport planes that drop tanks, that carry tanks in, they're C17- they're called GlobeMasters, and we had Canadian pilots flying during the Iraq war, part of the Iraq war flying vast amounts of war material, weapon systems including huge tanks, flying them right into battle zones. So there were Canadians flying US war planes. And they do that by being "on exchange", they're on exchange missions. The other thing is that these Canadian generals that are leading international forces of ground troops—they were on the ground. A general is not the guy that is back kicking doors in and running in and kidnapping people and shooting people, but he is overseeing. And, we had three Canadian generals that took turns overseeing that, they had boots on the ground, they were in Iraq. So that's another way that we had Canadian boots on the ground, army guys—they were actual generals

Michael Welch: And these generals, how many people would you say they had oversight

over?

Richard Sanders: That's a good question, I can't remember now, its been a few years since I researched it. Many thousands—let me see if I can very quickly find that. And, these guys received medals for their, for what they did.

Michael Welch: I believe one of those generals became-

Richard Sanders:— the Chief of Defense Staff. Walt Natynczyk- he led thirty-five thousand US troops in Iraq in 2004. He was there for over a year—sorry, about a year. So, from January 2004 to January 2005. He was given a medal by the Canadian governor general, Michaëlle Jean, saying—and I can quote to you on what it said, the text that is associated with the medal, it said: “Major General Natynczyk led the corps ten separate brigades consisting of more than thirty-five thousand soldiers stationed throughout the Iraq theatre of operations. He also oversaw the planning and execution of all corps level commanding support and combat service support operations. His pivotal role in the development of numerous plans and operations resulted in a tremendous contribution by the multinational corps to operation Iraqi freedom”—that's what they called the Iraq war—“... and has brought great credit to the Canadian forces and to Canada.” So, this is a medal that he receives for his leading role, commanding more than thirty-five thousand troops in Iraq, and then they have the gall to say that Canada wasn't involved in the war. I mean, it's just, it's ludicrous.

Michael Welch: If you saw the—

Richard Sanders: We're supposed to celebrate that Canada wasn't involved? All we're doing is celebrating that we've been deceived. That they've done a PR job, that they've been incredibly successful in their propaganda, and that they've been able to pull the wool over our eyes and deceive us and trick us in a psychological operation. Are we supposed to celebrate that? That's incredible.

Michael Welch: Richard Sanders, I notice that many of the ways in which Canada was, as you say, supporting the war, it was in terms of components and all this sort of connections that seem to go right to the guts of the military. I'm wondering if it's even possible for Canada to stay out of any US conflict given the level of, the tentacles between the Canadian and United States military industrial complex?

Richard Sanders: One of the examples I mentioned was the Canadian military exports, with the, the five billion a year or whatever to the US... that would be really hard, I mean, obviously we are so thoroughly integrated into the US war machine that Canadian parts are right in there on all these major weapons systems so if they called a war tomorrow, all of our, all of that stuff that Canadians made stuff, and these companies have received billions of dollars from the Canadian government to support their export industries... I mean, yeah, what can we do? We can say “we don't want you to fly these planes because they have all that equipment in it?”, no, we couldn't withdraw our support from that, it's too late for that. So in whatever war they happen to be fighting, Canada is playing its part. But there are other things, many of the other examples—training Iraq police, training Iraqi troops, we set up the phony elections, Elections Canada was a major part in setting up phony democratic elections in Iraq. Providing RADARSAT data, sending in these exchange troops, they could be withdrawn, sending in the generals- we didn't have to do that. Sending in our ships in the Persian gulf, we didn't have to do that. We even had a Canadian commodore that was

leading the entire multinational fleet of warships escorting the US warships into place for the initial bombardment of Iraq. And we didn't have to do that—we could have called, we could have stopped all those things. And yeah, once you've sold them the equipment, you can't stop them from using it. But they could have stopped—let's say we found out that Canadian companies were selling weapons to oh, Syria. You don't think that they could stop it? Of course they could. But, you're right. We're so thoroughly integrated into the US war machine it is very difficult to pull out.

Michael Welch: So why is this meme so pervasive, this idea that Canada said no to the war in Iraq. Why is it that people continue to believe this in spite of all the documentation that you've put forwards?

Richard Sanders: Well, all the research that I do and that other people do doesn't mean anything in comparison to the mainstream media. Right, I mean I've got very little help from the mainstream media. The corporate media and also the... it fits into a huge mythology that we've had for a few decades, the whole myth of Canada as a great force for peace in the world, so it fits so nicely into that mythology that it was easy to sell this particular spin on that mythology because it fits in so nicely, so people will just go 'yeah, that's right, of course, because Canada is not a war-fighter, we're a peace loving country, all that, blahblah" so it's easy for the media to lie to us. The NDP was not much help, they basically went along with the mythology. They did do some work to expose the ways in which Canada was involved, but basically when the government said "Okay, so we've decided not to be involved" even though they were, they basically said "okay, we're not involved" then the NDP was bending over backwards to congratulate itself for having pressured the government to not being involved in the war. So, they got credit, they got support from their membership.

Michael Welch: But you know Richard, it seems to me that even so-called progressive forces who are even instinctively suspicious of the mainstream media, they seem to buy into that message as well, don't you find?

Richard Sanders: Many do. Many people don't have, just haven't seen the evidence. When you see it, it's really hard to ignore, it's really hard to not realize that we were involved when you see the list of all the things that we did. But somehow, there are peace activists- - I think there is an overlap with people who are big supports of the international criminal court, big supporters of the so-called responsibility to protect, this new doctrine that the US and NATO countries use as a pretext for going to war, you know, that used to be called humanitarian intervention. So there is an overlap between these different mythologies, or these different doctrines that are used to put a nice façade on war and participation in war. So you have people in the peace movement that are willing to go along with these pretenses, you have to ask them how they managed to wrap their minds among these things, because it seems to me that the cognitive dissonance that these contradictions would create in your mind would be so strong that you wouldn't be able to keep such complete opposite idea going in your mind at the same time. How can you believe that Canada wasn't involved, and at the same time know that we did this and this and this and this and this to help the war. I mean, it so completely contradictory, that you think it would cause some discomfort in your mind that you wouldn't be able to continue to believe these things. But somehow, they manage to. Or—the whole responsibility to protect thing, how can they believe that the United States can lead a war to protect human rights? Don't they know anything about the long history of US wars? So, you have to ask, it would be good for you to interview people and question them about that... how do they support these ideas

like the responsibility to protect and the idea that Canada is a great and wonderful peace-keeping country when it is engaged in war to the extent that it is?

Michael Welch: Well, Richard Sanders I want to thank you very much for shedding some light there on why there, on the reality of Canada's involvement in Iraq , and I guess if people want more information about your publication or your website, where would you direct them?

Richard Sanders: Well, if you do a search for the Coalition to Oppose the Arms Trade then you'll find our website, and there is lots of detailed information there with references and footnotes and whatnot to prove beyond any shadow of a doubt to prove that Canada was very, very deeply involved in the Iraq war, not only during the initial invasion, but in the many years since.

Michael Welch: Richard Sanders has been involved with the Coalition to Oppose the Arms Trade, and publishes Press for Conversion magazine. Thank you very much for joining us Richard.

Richard Sanders: Thank you very much for having me.

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