

Colin Powell, Keep Out

The case for blocking Bush's war spinner at our border

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Colin Powell, George Bush's former secretary of state and previously the general in charge of the slaughter of Iraqi troops in the first Gulf war, is scheduled to speak in Vancouver on June 12. Possibly setting a new standard for hypocrisy, the title of his talk is "Leadership in the 21st Century."

We shouldn't let him into the country, and here's why.

Powell has been dogged for years by accusations of war crimes, crimes against humanity and grave human rights abuses including torture.

There is enough evidence available to suggest that, at the very least, the federal government should investigate Powell for the alleged violations of international law. The government has made it clear where it stands on such crimes: "The policy of the Government of Canada is unequivocal. Canada will not be a safe haven for persons involved in war crimes, crimes against humanity or other reprehensible acts."

Lawyers Against the War

An international jurists group, Lawyers Against the War (LAW), are trying to stop Powell's entry into Canada. Given that Stephen Harper is prime minister and a dedicated supporter of the Bush administration and the Iraq war, the chances of success are slim.

But consider what the law says. Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, section 35(1) (a) states that a foreign national is inadmissible on grounds of violating human or international rights or for committing an act outside Canada that constitutes an offence referred to in sections 4 to 7 of the Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes Act. Also inadmissible are persons who are, or were, senior officials "in the service of a government that, in the opinion of the Minister, engages or has engaged in gross human rights violations..."

What constitutes crimes against humanity and war crimes?

According to LAW, "crimes against humanity" include murder, enforced disappearance, deportation, imprisonment, torture, imprisonment in violation of fundamental rules of international law, committed against any civilian population or any identifiable group. War crimes includes willful killing, torture and inhumane treatment, unlawful confinement, willfully depriving a prisoner of war or other protected person of fair trial rights, or intentionally launching an attack that will cause incidental loss of life or injury to civilians.

Spinning weapons, detainees

Powell, the general in charge of the first Gulf war, was also secretary of state from 2001 to 2005, and thus a key member of the Bush administration that planned and executed the illegal and brutal invasion of Iraq .

Not only did Powell lie to the United Nations about Iraq having weapons of mass destruction, he was a key member of the group within that administration that devised the notorious extra-legal system whereby the U.S. captured and imprisoned non-Americans, denied them any legal protection and subjected them to a wide range of gross human rights violations, including extraordinary rendition and torture.

In a Jan. 26, 2002 memo he suggested to President Bush that he either decide that the Geneva Convention did not apply to a “failed state” such as Afghanistan , or that it did apply, but not to anyone declared by the president to be Al Qaeda or Taliban members. Either option, said Powell, would “provide the same practical flexibility in how we treat detainees, including with respect to interrogation and length of the detention.”

In May, 2004, the U.S. National Lawyers Guild called for the appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate Colin Powell and others for war crimes committed during the illegal war on Iraq . In 2003, Powell (along with several other U.S. officials) was the target of two criminal complaints under Belgium ‘s 1993 universal-jurisdiction genocide law, for his actions in the second Gulf war. Under pressure from the U.S. , Belgium repealed the law shortly after the charges were filed.

Powell’s history of controversy

In 1991, an independent International War Crimes Tribunal headed by former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark, found Powell and others guilty of war crimes against Iraq in the first Gulf war, including indiscriminate killing of civilians, targeting of national infrastructure, and the wholesale slaughter of thousands of Iraqi troops (while withdrawing from Kuwait) for no military purpose.

During the Vietnam war Powell was assigned to investigate widespread charges that U.S. troops were brutalizing Vietnamese civilians. In claiming relations between troops and civilians were “excellent,” and in particular for failing to mention the most notorious example, the My Lai massacre, Powell was later accused by some of a cover-up.

There are enough unanswered questions about Powell’s culpability in illegal acts in both Gulf wars that the federal government should deny him entry into Canada . Indeed, the evidence is compelling enough that if Powell does arrive in Canada the government should follow Canada ‘s war crimes legislation. Under that legislation, according to LAW, Canada is obliged to arrest him and either prosecute him for torture and other crimes, or extradite him to a jurisdiction that is willing to prosecute him.

If the Harper government is not prepared to take our war crimes legislation seriously, then it should do the honest thing and repeal them.

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