

Media Can't Even Tell the Truth About Canada's Foreign Policy History

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Region: [Canada](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

Media coverage of Canadian foreign policy is uniquely one-sided and biased. It's so bad that few readers, listeners or viewers will have ever seen or heard an honest analysis of this country's past, let alone current role around the world.

A recent Maclean's story titled "[The long](#) history of 'go back to where you came from' in Canada" illustrates how uniquely bad foreign policy coverage is.

The story demonstrates that it is permissible to detail the history of racist immigration policy, but can one imagine Maclean's publishing a story headlined "the long history of Canada advancing Empire"? No major media outlet — or the National Observer, Tyee or Press Progress, for that matter — would highlight how every prime minister since Confederation has advanced violent, antidemocratic and pro-corporate international policies.

Don't believe me? Here's a brief summary:

- John A McDonald helped recruit nearly [four hundred](#) Canadians to beat back anti-colonial resistance in the Sudan in 1884-85 and during his decades in power Canadians were trained to be officers in Britain's conquest across Africa.
- Wilfrid Laurier's government oversaw the deployment of seven thousand Canadians to defend British imperial interests in what's now South Africa.
- Robert Borden dispatched 600,000 men to fight a war with no clear and compelling purpose other than rivalry between up-and-coming Germany and the lead imperial powers of the day, Britain and France. After World War I Borden sought to be [compensated](#) with Britain's Caribbean colonies and publicly encouraged Canadian businessmen to buy up southern Mexico.
- R. B. Bennett deployed [two destroyers](#) to assist a month-old military coup government's brutal suppression of a peasant and Indigenous rebellion in El Salvador, which London thought might be a "danger to British banks, railways and other British lives and property" as well as a Canadian-owned utility. Bolstered by the Royal Canadian Navy's presence, the military regime would commit "one of the worst massacres of civilians in the history of the Americas."
- William Lyon Mackenzie King was sympathetic to European fascism. His government criminalized Canadians who fought against Franco's fascists in Spain while arming Japanese fascists. In September 1936 King wrote that Adolf Hitler "[might come](#) to be thought of as one of the saviours of the world." After atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki Mackenzie King declared, "it gives me pleasure to announce that Canadian scientists played an

important role, having been intimately connected, in an efficient manner, to this great scientific development.”

- Louis St. Laurent’s government endorsed the Washington sponsored overthrow of popularly elected Iranian Prime Minister [Mohammad Mossadegh](#) and Guatemalan President [Jacobo Arbenz](#). St. Laurent dispatched eight Canadian warships and 27,000 troops to fight in Korea. The US-led force massively expanded what was essentially a civil war, which ultimately left as many as four million dead.
- John Diefenbaker blamed Fidel Castro for the CIA-backed Bay of Pigs invasion. His government also sent troops to [undermine](#) Congolese independence leader Patrice Lumumba who he labelled a “major threat to Western interests”.
- Lester Pearson’s government [played a part](#) in the downfall of leading pan-Africanist Kwame Nkrumah and sent a vessel to support the US invasion of the Dominican Republic to stop a left-wing government from taking office. He staunchly defended the US war in Vietnam, which greatly benefited Canadian arms sellers. Pearson had Canadian International Control Commission officials [deliver](#) US bombing threats to the North Vietnamese leadership.
- Pierre Trudeau was [hostile](#) to Salvador Allende’s elected government and did business with Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship in Chile. He embraced Indonesia’s occupation of East Timor and [sympathized](#) with South Africa’s apartheid regime not the black liberation movement or nascent Canadian solidarity groups.
- Brian Mulroney “justified” the US invasion of Panama, which left 4,000 dead. He also backed US airstrikes on Libya that left 37 people dead and 93 wounded in a failed bid to kill Mohammed Gaddafi. His government deployed three naval vessels, 26 aircraft and 4,000 personnel to the Middle East in a war that killed 20,000 Iraqi troops and between 20,000 and 200,000 civilians.
- Jean Chrétien deployed 18 fighter jets to NATO’s illegal 78-day bombing of Serbia, which left hundreds dead and hundreds of thousands displaced. He began Canada’s pointless war in Afghanistan and his government held a [meeting to plan](#) the overthrow of Haitian democracy.
- Paul Martin ramped up the war in Afghanistan. He dispatched troops to overthrow president Jean Bertrand Aristide in Haiti and provided various forms of support to the post-coup regime responsible for thousands of deaths.
- Stephen Harper supported Israel’s war on Lebanon and repeated onslaughts on Gaza. He had Canada head NATO’s bombing of Libya, which has led to eight years of civil war and greater instability in Africa’s Sahel region.
- Justin Trudeau has [armed](#) Saudi Arabia, [backed brutal](#) mining companies, expanded [NATO deployments](#), [opposed](#) Palestinian rights, [refused to support](#) nuclear weapons controls, [deepened ties](#) to repressive Middle East monarchies, [supported](#) Africa’s most ruthless dictator, [propped](#) up a corrupt, repressive and illegitimate Haitian president, [tried to topple](#) the Venezuelan government, etc.

Of course, the dominant media is skewed towards the outlook of their wealthy owners, corporate advertisers and power more generally on all matters. How the bias plays out depends on the issue and time. In recent years, for instance, there has been a marked increase of space devoted to discussing Canada’s genocidal dispossession of First Nations. But, even as Canada’s most fundamental injustice begins to receive dominant media attention it is still largely forbidden to present an overarching critique of foreign policy history. It’s acceptable to write about “The long history of ‘go back to where you came from’ in Canada” but not that “foreign policy has long advanced corporate interests and empire.”

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