Why Is Canada Bombing Iraq?

Canadians are bombing Iraqis and no one outside the deeply unpopular government of Stephen Harper really knows why. The propaganda system that controls the Canadian media succeeds in sowing confusion upon mystery and all we are allowed to understand is that Canada has once again revealed itself as a country without any existential existence. It is a regional backwater of the United States of America, the remaining vestiges of sovereignty and independence submerged in the swamp of American imperialism and culture.

Long gone are the glory days when a Canadian actually felt distinct in North America, when Canada tried to maintain an independent foreign policy and a national culture born out of the richness of the three founding peoples, the First Nations, the French and the English. Too many have forgotten that the Canadian provinces of the British Empire in North America refused to join the rebellion of the rising bourgeoisie in the 13 colonies along the Atlantic coast. Many Americans who were persecuted by the rebels for staying loyal to the British Crown fled to Canada in the aftermath and never returned. They had a name, the United Empire Loyalists, and the Americans never forgave them or the Canadians for refusing to join in their grand project of the conquest of North America and, consequently, the first of the American wars of conquest was the invasion of Canada in the War of 1812, the primary objective of which was the takeover of all the remaining British territories on the continent.

The American propaganda then was the same as it is now. The invading American forces posted notices in towns and villages announcing that they were bringing the people of Canada “democracy and liberty.” But no one wanted what they were offering and after many battles fought by British regulars, native forces and local militias the Americans were kicked out and put that objective on the back burner while they plundered the lands of the peoples of the interior and then turned on Mexico. They didn’t attempt it again until President Grant contemplated using the Union Armies to invade just after the American Civil War but the idea was abandoned aside from support for Irish Fenian guerrilla raids into Canada in the late 1860s. After that a physical invasion was not necessary since the invasion of finance capital got them all they wanted without a shot fired.

Canada remained a formal colony of British capital until 1867 when it was finally organised as a self governing state within the British empire after a series of internal struggles for more self rule by the growing mercantile and industrial elites but it only achieved any real independence as a country in the 1930’s as Britain’s power rapidly declined after its huge losses of the First World War. But the establishment of a country more independent of Britain did not result in an independent nation. Canada relied on foreign capital to build its infrastructure, its continental railway systems, its hydro-electric projects, its factories, its cities and where British capital could not supply the need it was quickly replaced by American capital.

The domination of the country by the Americans accelerated after the Second World War but it was countered by a rising nationalist feeling generated in part by Canada’s disproportionately large contribution to fighting the fascists in Europe. A nation of eleven million people fielded military forces of almost a million and in 1945 Canada had the third largest navy in the world. After the war the working classes, many of whom viewed the Soviet Union as the most progressive nation in the world, despite the elites’ anti-Russian and anti-socialist propaganda, supported socialist ideals that resulted in the establishment of free national health care and low cost education, affordable
housing and were enthusiastic about Canadian artists and writers. They saw how a nation like Russia had rapidly developed its industrial and societal resources in a landmass that was very similar to Canada and realised that they could do the same. But it was not to be. Soon the American dominance began to be felt, with the forced dumping of Hollywood films in Canadian theatres, the take over of oil and gas exploration and pipeline construction, the stifling of any really independent steps to national development and of course the fateful decision under US pressure to join the Nato alliance.

The years of the late 50’s and 60’s saw Canadian leaders trying to act independently of the American power. In one famous episode, Prime Minister Lester Pearson declined U.S. requests to send Canadian combat troops into the Vietnam War. Pearson spoke at Temple University in Philadelphia on 2 April 1965 and called for a pause in the American bombing of North Vietnam, so that a diplomatic solution to the war could be found. President Johnson, who rose to power through the coup d’état against President Kennedy in 1963, saw this criticism of American foreign policy on American soil as an intolerable sin. Before Pearson had finished his speech, he was summoned to Camp David, Maryland, to meet with Johnson the next day. Johnson, a very large man, who was a notorious thug, reportedly picked up Pearson, a very small man, by the lapels and shouted, "Don't you come into my living room and piss on my rug."

The last gasp of Canadian attempts at real independence took place under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau who, though not withdrawing from NATO, tried to create a foreign policy in Canadian interests and was one of the first western leaders to open the door to China, long before Nixon, and remained friends with Fidel Castro all his life. It was Trudeau that finally negotiated with the British for the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution in 1982, finally severing the last legal ties to British rule. He called for the creation of a “Just Society” with real participatory democracy and concern for the collective good and for Canada to become more engaged with the rest of the world instead of just being fixated on the United States. But the fall of Trudeau and the rise of the right wing in Canada in the late 80’s led to the rise of the continentalists, that is those Canadians financiers and industrialists who saw their interests lying in New York instead of Toronto. The counter-revolution in the USSR accelerated this process as neoliberalism and free trade became the dominant doctrine and, in a series of free trade and security agreements, starting in 1993, Canada quickly surrendered its hard won sovereignty almost overnight to the interests of American capital.

As a result, in rapid succession, Canadian military forces were assigned the role of auxiliaries to American forces and helped the Americans overthrow the government of Rwanda in 1993, participated in the criminal aggression against Yugoslavia in 1999, the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan in 2001, participated in the overthrow of President Aristide of Haiti in 2004, assisted US forces in Iraq during the American invasion and occupation of Iraq, supplied forces in the Gulf of Aden to threaten Iran, played a major role in the bombing and destruction of Libya in 2011, supplied military supplies to the Kiev regime during the attacks on the peoples of the Donbas this summer and now is bombing Fallujah, the very heart of the Iraqi resistance to the American occupation.

Canadian forces operating in Iraq are insignificant, amounting to just a few planes and 600 personnel. This token contribution to the continued American operations has no real military purpose. So when we want to understand the reason for Canada’s actions, its clear pandering to the diktats and on behalf of the interests of the United States we just have to know the history of the development of the country to understand that the real purpose for these military theatrics is propaganda. Canada’s role is simply to provide an international cover to what is clearly an American operation. One can see this by reading the Canadian Ministry of Defence website on the action which refers to US requests and orders and which then provides a link to US Command Headquarters.

The lesson to be drawn from all this is that any nation that surrenders its sovereignty to a dominant power becomes the tool of that power. The interests of its own people count for nothing. International law and peace count for nothing. Human life counts for nothing. Yet, to the south, in Latin America, the nations that were once, like Canada, under the thumb of the American empire, have become vibrant, confident nations whose governments act in the interests of the collective population instead of the narrow interests of finance capital. In the east we see the energy of the changes accelerate in China, India and Russia. The example is there. Nations like Canada can choose their own path, their own destiny in peaceful cooperation with the nations and peoples of the world. The problem is how the people of Canada, and, indeed, all nations, can escape this domination and survive it. Unfortunately, with the continentalists still in control in Washington and Ottawa, New York and Toronto, and with American control of the economic resources at an intolerable level, the situation looks bleak for the immediate future. Canadians are nothing more than servants in their own house, when, to use the phrase of the Quebec nationalists in their struggle for self determination, we should be “maître chez nous,” masters of our own house. The Canadian people are watching what is going on in the rest of the world and they are learning from what they see. In that lies, perhaps, some hope.
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