

## ***CANADA IN THE AGE OF TERROR – MULTILATERALISM MEETS A MOMENT OF TRUTH***

by **MICHAEL IGNATIEFF \***

**A**re we a target? Is Canada and are Canadians targets in a war on terror? There was a story in the *New York Times* recently, which is one of those semi-funny, semi-not-so-funny, stories that helps us to focus this issue.

An American diplomat was assassinated in Amman, Jordan. The *Times* sent several reporters to Amman to ask the Americans who remained how they felt about their security now that an American had been gunned down in a terrorist attack. At least one American, an academic on leave, teaching in Amman, said what he did about his security dilemma: when he got into a taxi and they asked him where he came from, he said “I’m from Canada,” but the taxi driver, a Jordanian, turned around and said, “where from?” and the guy began to make it up and said, “well, I’m from Montreal,” and the taxi driver said, “I was 10 years in Montreal myself” and the American, now in big trouble, figuring that a display of local knowledge was called for, said “those Expos are a great team, eh?” Which was, of course, the giveaway, because if you have got local knowledge, it has got to be the right local knowledge, and as Canadians know, there are many things true about the Expos, but a good team is not one of them. So that is the story and let me interpret it a little bit for you.

This American thinks that Canadians are not targets, which is why he is telling the taxi driver that he is a Canadian, and a lot of Canadians think that. They think really that 9/11 happened to people somewhere else, even though Canadians died in the Twin Towers. There is a very strong reflex in all

Canadians, it’s as strong in me as it is in you, to think that they are not after us. “Don’t attack me, I’m a Canadian,” is a very, very strong reflex in our country and always has been, and to be blunt, it is naive narcissism. It is also a serious mistake, because after the Bali attack – where a student of mine at Harvard had been in that very bar two months before – nearly 200 people died who happened to be Australian, but they could have been Canadians.

We are not primary targets but we are secondary targets. And why? I believe we are secondary targets because we are a secular, liberal, democratic state in the North Atlantic region and we stand for everything that al Qaeda doesn’t like. We are part of a particular civilization and tradition which is in the gun-sights of a small and determined group of people who, self-evidently, don’t speak for Islam, but speak for a lot of angry people in the world, and we might as well understand that we are in someone else’s gun-sights. Let’s not forget that taxi driver, because that is a hidden part of this story. We need to hope, as a society, that taxi drivers like that guy have a happy memory of Montreal. We need to be very sure that people from the Islamic world, who come to our society, stay for a while and then go home, take home to that part of the world a memory of this being a decent, inclusive place. It is suddenly very important to us that we do a good job and that a cab driver in Amman, in Cairo, in Islamabad, all over the world, thinks well of this country. I don’t think we will fail to meet the challenge. But suddenly the connection between our domestic policy, what kind of multicultural society we actually are, actually tolerant, actually welcoming, is important. That is how I see the meaning of that story, what we are abroad and what we are at home are one. The influence we project abroad depends on the kind of society we are at home.

One of the great foreign policy challenges facing Canada is staying independent in an age of empire. This is a question about how we maintain national independence and an independent foreign policy in an era in which our neighbour to the south is an imperial power engaging in a particularly unilateral definition of its foreign policy.

**T**he post-Cold War world has given Canada an opportunity for much more independence in its foreign policy. There are many examples of the ways in which the country has run an independent foreign policy, which I think we can be proud of. The ones I always pick are things that we tend not to take for granted,

but look very salient when you live in the United States, as I do. We have diplomatic relations with Cuba. Our foreign policy is not held hostage to the Cuban exiles. We have good business relations with that regime, we have human rights difficulties with it, but we are engaged with it. That foreign policy decision, taken some 35 years ago, something that is a vector of our independence, the Americans don't like it, tough!

The second example is that we have taken a lead on land mines. The Americans don't like it, but we lead across the world on that issue, and Canadians, I think, can take justified pride that if fewer kids are having their legs blown off, it is partly because of a lot of hardworking people in our Department of Foreign Affairs.

The third thing we have taken a leadership role on, obviously, is the International Criminal Court, towards which the Americans are totally allergic, but we have led, we have persisted, we now have a functioning court in the Hague, and I think we can claim a strong degree of Canadian ownership in that initiative.

And we have examples of Canadian independence every day of the week. Recently, Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham said to the Americans: "Do not subject Canadian citizens whose countries of origin are in a set of suspect countries to scrutiny at your border, please." The key issue here is the indivisibility of Canadian citizenship, a bedrock issue: it doesn't matter where you were born, if you have a Canadian passport, you are entitled to the full protection of our country, our sovereignty and our political will. In Washington, I live my working life in a policy environment in which Canada is a kind of well-meaning Boy Scout. We are not taken seriously. The problem

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is that there is actually an increasing gulf between our vision of what the future should look like and the American vision. The problem of influence is not just a problem about Canada, it is a problem about the influence of Britain, the European powers. They increasingly have the same vision of the world that we do, and our problem of influence is set within this larger problem, that the European allies have a vision of a multilateral world in which the legitimacy of the use of force must reside in the UN; sovereignty is not unconditional, it is limited and bound by human rights agreements, by multilateral engagements, which limit and constrain the sovereignty of states in the name of collective social goods. That is the Canadian vision of multilateralism, to which Europe also largely subscribes. We have aligned our foreign policy with that multilateral vision of the world and our neighbours to the south don't like it one little bit.

That's our influence problem. It is not just that we are the friendly Boy Scout to the north, it is that they actually don't agree with the substance of the foreign policy that we defend along with a lot of other countries. It is not just the problem of the Bush Administration, it runs through administrations back some years now: is they are multilateral when it is to the advantage of the United States, unilateral when they can get away with it. It is a vision in which world order is guaranteed by the power and might and influence of the super power, as opposed to the spreading influence of international law.

The challenge is for us to find a multilateral vision that is robust, that has the following properties: it is able to stand up to the Americans and disagree frankly when we disagree, but at the same time is willing to put teeth into multilateralism. Iraq is an issue, unfortunately, where multilateralism meets its moment of truth. If we actually believe in international law, and that is the crux and heart of Canadian foreign policy, we don't want to have Iraq defying UN Security Council resolutions on a vital issue. Why is that an issue? Because there is a regime that has just about the worst human rights record on earth and is in possession of weapons of mass destruction. It is not just the weapons, lots of other people have the weapons, it is the combination of a rights-violating regime that has an expansionist record in possession of deadly weapons. You can't believe in multilateralism, international law, unless you are prepared also to believe that occasionally you have to step up to the plate and defend it, and by force if necessary. So I am as multilateralist as any Canadian, but you can't talk

the talk unless you are also prepared to walk the walk.

If you are a multilateralist who believes in the UN, believes in the rule of law internationally, then you can't pretend that this isn't going on; you can't pretend that the United States invented this problem; you can't pretend that it is going to go away if the Bush Administration could be persuaded otherwise. That is the test of the multilateralist, don't just beat your gums about it, there are moments when people define international law and you have got to decide what to do about it. This doesn't make me, by the way, a rooting branch supporter of bombing Baghdad tomorrow morning. I am not convinced that military action is justifiable in this case, but I don't want to shy away from the possibility that we may have to go that route, it seems dishonest to pretend otherwise.

The problem we have got in terms of maintaining influence, and if you talk to people at NATO they feel this very strongly, is that we have built our institutional influence in the world by getting into alliances, long-term alliances, of which NATO is the best example. Our international security ideal is tied to these alliances. But they are Cold War institutions that have had a lot of trouble adjusting to a post-Cold War world and the Americans are saying to the Canadians, "we don't really think alliances are very interesting, what we like are coalitions of the willing." The difference between an alliance and a coalition of the willing is that the coalition of the willing is driven by the strongest power, it is an *ad hoc* thing, assembled for a particular operation and dissolved afterwards, but its key property is that it is dominated by the coalition leader. An alliance structure gives smaller powers like us much more influence at the table; in coalitions of the willing, we are much smaller players. In a world of coalitions of the willing our institutional place in world order is much less certain and much more troubling to us, but again we have to be honest about this problem. One of the reasons Americans are fed up with places like NATO, and institutions like NATO and alliances is that they have to carry all the water. The NATO multilateral bombing campaign to compel a human rights violator to stop abusing one of his minority groups only occurred because the United States stepped up to the plate and used military power. All the rest of the allies were secondary players. So the American impatience with alliances, where they bear all the burdens and we come along to provide intellectual and moral legitimacy, that bargain strikes the Americans as being a poor one.

So what do we do to leverage the assets that we have got? We have got independence, how do we get influence in this situation? I have said one thing we have to do, we have to put our money where our mouth is, if we believe in international law, we believe in multilateralism, we have got to support efforts to

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make sure that UN Security Council resolutions are not just passed, but obeyed and complied with. In our relations with the Americans, we have got to understand something about this. We have something they want. They need legitimacy. It is not the case the Americans are comfortable, either domestically or internationally, a *projecting* force abroad unilaterally, they don't like it, they feel exposed, they want friends to come along. Our presence in Afghanistan may seem symbolic, but it is extremely important in producing legitimacy for the operation. So we have got legitimacy to sell and if we have got legitimacy to sell then we shouldn't sell it cheap, we should be proud of what we bring to the table and we should tell them, "if you want our support, here are the conditions." We

have, it seems to me, a much too deep inferiority complex to operate effectively in an empire. We have to be tougher.

The other thing that we have got is that we have got a lot of experience in

one of the emerging fields in foreign policy, which is simply reconstructing devastated societies. The other thing Americans need allies for is simply to reconstruct, to rebuild, to fix, to create order. Americans are very good at knocking the doors down, very good at smashing the place up, very good at punishing rogue states. They are much less good, and have much less resources for the post-operation reconstruction, they need allies to do that.

The idea of influence derives from three assets: moral authority as a good citizen, which we have got some of, military capacity, which we have got a lot less of, and international assistance capability. Moral authority, military capacity and international assistance capacity. We have got some of the first, and very little of the second and third. We have got to wake up, we cannot go on being a good citizen unless we pay the price of being a good citizen.

So the question is, what we are doing about the military and what we are doing about development aid? Canadians tend to argue that you can have one or the other: the constituencies who like spending money on the military and the constituencies that like spending it on development, and they tend to be different constituencies, some are more conservative, some are more liberal, and it seems to me a foolish and divisive debate. We can either have development assistance or we can have a capable military, but we can't have both. What kind of country are we; is this a great country? What is the *misérabilisme* that says we can't even defend ourselves, we can't project power overseas, and we can't do a decent job at good citizenship? We have got to get out of the mind set that says that we have got to choose military stuff or development assistance stuff, because the reality of the dirty world out there, that I see when I walk out there, is that you cannot help in a dangerous and divided world unless you have military capacity.

It is just one of the realities, it is a painful and difficult one and it is not just the capacity to be peacekeepers, it's the capacity to have combat-capable lethality. There is something very curious about the way the military spine that was a part of a central national identity of our culture has just slipped away, so that when you make a claim in defence of national defence and military expenditure, you are ultimately regarded as some kind of foaming-at-the-mouth war monger. It is a very odd thing and literally incomprehensible to my parents' and grandparents' generation, like my uncle who landed in Italy in 1943 and fought to the very gates of Berlin. That is part of the Canadian tradition and it is something we should be intensely proud of.

What does this have to do with now? It has to do with the difficulty we have in raising a consensus and constituency in Canada in support of the Canadian Forces. We can raise some consensus on behalf of peacekeeping, but the peacekeeping we celebrate in the Peacekeeping Monument statue is over, it is peacekeeping of the Sinai in 1956, the war is over and you are just standing in between two sides who have agreed not to fight.

The use of military power that I saw through the Balkans, all through the 90s, that I saw in Afghanistan in the summer, is you are patrolling much, much meaner streets. You are providing basic security so that girls can go back to school in Afghanistan; so that people can shop in a marketplace without being shot; that's the kind of patrolling in the mean streets you have got to have the capability to do, if you want to serve the interests of peace and security in the world out there now.

We think, again with a kind of narcissism that is not caught up with the realities, that we are still the leading peacekeeping nation in the world. Wake up. The chief contributor to peacekeeping in the world is not Canada, it is Bangladesh. Of all the people contributing to UN peacekeeping, Bangladesh is at the top, India number two. Where do we come? We come 34<sup>th</sup>. Do you know who is ahead of us? The United States. We are living off a Pearsonian reputation that we no longer deserve. We not only don't contribute enough to peacekeeping, we are not planning or training to do the right kind of peacekeeping, which is combat-capable peace enforcement in zones of conflict, like Afghanistan and the Balkans.

A lot of the human rights challenges we face, in shattered states, in states like Afghanistan that have been taken over by terrorists and then taken down, is providing basic, existential security for ordinary human beings just like you and me. You can't do any development, you can't get any order in these societies unless you have combat power on the ground. This is the new reality we are in and this is the reality we have to do something in Canada to fix, and you can't fix it by spending 1.1 percent of GDP on national defence, you can't do it. You can't do it on an U.S. \$8 billion defence budget. We've got to spend more, if we want to have any influence in Washington, if we want to have any legitimacy as a multilateralist, if we want to keep any of the promises that we are making to ourselves in the mirror and to people overseas.

Another thing to look at is development aid. When Lester Pearson, retired as prime minister, did a report on development in 1970, he asked what was the baseline standard for being a good citizen in the world today? He suggested contributing 0.7 percent of GDP to international overseas development assistance. That is the number all countries should shoot for, and for 30 years that has been the benchmark. Has this country ever met it? Never. There is a gap between what we think we are doing as good citizens and what we actually do.

One of our great strengths as a country is that we are a well-ordered and a well-governed society. By international standards, we are relatively free of corruption, relatively honestly governed, we have made federalism work between two national communities for 135 years which is a huge international achievement in which we can take great pride. We have run a multicultural society now for 40 to 50 years in ways we can take some pride in. Peace, order and good government is what we always stood for as a country.

We need to focus Canadian foreign policy on governance. We are very good at police. We have got some of the most famous police, the most trusted police in the world, these countries need help with the police. We have a great constitutional court, the Supreme Court of Canada, a tremendous constitutional tradition. These countries need constitutions. We have a mostly honourable, though always unpopular, legal profession. These folks need rule of law. We have got strength after strength after strength in what it takes to get governance working in a society. Good constitution, good rule of law, good courts, good cops. We should focus much more on our strengths as a country.

We have enormous strengths as a country, enormous achievements in the foreign policy of the country, but we fail to match the good-citizen image with the resources to justify it, and the challenge for us, as citizens, and for Canada's leadership is to match rhetoric with resources, to close the gap between who we think we are and what we actually do. That is a dilemma in our private lives, are we what we seem to be? Are the images we have of ourselves true in the world? This is true for individuals, it is true for countries and the challenge for citizens is to know who we are, to be proud of that and, above all, be willing to pay the price. Moral identities and moral examples don't come cheap and neither does our security.

## Endnotes:

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Michael Ignatieff, "Canada in the Age of Terror – Multilateralism Meets A Moment of Truth" *Policy Options*, (February 2003), Vol. 24, #2, p. 14-18.



## SECTION TWO – THE DEBATE:

*INDEPENDENCE – CANADA’S ‘SPECIAL  
VOCATION’ ON THE ‘THIRD TRACK’*