

## War's Secret Weapon

Forget guns, bombs and spies. Canada's role lies in showing the U.S. how to deal with anti-Americanism.

By James Ron

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Instead of trumpeting Canada's military contribution to the Afghan war, this country can help global anti-terror efforts by pushing America towards a more self-critical engagement with the world. Canadians have a less aggressive world-view than their southern neighbor, and can thus help Americans understand why many in the developing world regard them with such mistrust.

Canadian advice on this count is vital, since the success of Western anti-terror efforts depends on the cooperation of ordinary people throughout the Middle East, Indonesia, North Africa, and Central Asia. Although the U.S. has built up an impressive global coalition of political elites, their efforts are likely to fail without broad, grass-roots support.

In the past month, debates have raged in this country over whether American foreign policy helped create the conditions for terrorism. Many say critiques of American policies are insensitive, disloyal, or naive, but this disregard for serious discussion is deeply misguided. No successful politician ever ignores public opinion, and today, the relevant public is global.

At stake are not the opinions of actual terrorists, since they are likely to be motivated by sentiments resistant to deliberation. Instead, the relevant audiences are the millions of ordinary people who feel sympathy for American terror victims, but believe that nonetheless, America had it coming. Canada can help address their feelings by promoting a frank discussion of American misdeeds, past and present.

After all, America has little need for the handful of soldiers Canada has sent to fight, and U.S. warplanes, ships and special forces are more than a match for Afghanistan's Taliban. What America really requires is a trusted friend able to help it understand, and concretely address, global anti-Americanism. Canada is the best ally for job because it has an independent and respected voice in international affairs, and because it has left no bitter colonial legacy in the developing world.

There will always be some who resent the world's only superpower, but many critiques of America stem from concrete policy choices. Indeed, few serious scholars of world affairs would deny that the U.S. government often makes deeply unethical choices for strategic, selfish or short-sighted reasons, and that these policies have helped generate grass-roots anti-Americanism.

As an American, I can protest policies I dislike by voting, writing my congressperson, or joining a political party. None of those methods, however, are available to foreign nationals living

abroad, even when their lives are deeply impacted by American decisions. Small wonder that some support acts of terror; indiscriminate violence, after all, is a repugnant but effective way of gaining political voice.

Most Americans are deeply ignorant of the unsavory deeds their country has preformed around the world. They know that 50,000 American soldiers died in Vietnam, for example, but never speak of the hundreds of thousands their army killed in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. They support the prosecution of Serbs who backed deadly paramilitaries in Bosnia, but deride the notion of investigating U.S. officials supportive of killers in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile, and Haiti. They rage at Iran for its religious intolerance, but ignore America's early support for the Shah of Iran's brutal security services. They express shock at Saddam Hussein's willingness to use poison gas, but forget he did so while serving as a U.S. ally.

Americans know little of these and other events, but those who suffered have not even begun to forget. If the U.S. does not address this painful legacy head on, its war on terror will not attract the mass support it requires. Canada can help by beginning a serious debate on U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, with special emphasis U.S. policy towards Iraq and Israel.

In 1991, after reversing Saddam Hussein's Kuwait invasion, America organized a comprehensive embargo against Iraq to contain its military. Although the goal was laudable, the result was catastrophic. The sanctions created a public health crisis of enormous proportions, and during the 1990s, between 106,000 to 220,000 children aged five and under needlessly died, as well as hundreds of thousands of others.

How many of us lost a night's sleep over Iraq's civilian suffering? How many of us even knew? The Arab world, however, watched with horror, similar to our feelings for the September 11 bombing, but in slow motion, over many years.

America's unequivocal support for Israel is another source of frustration. Israel, like any country, has both good and bad qualities, providing haven for Jews, but displacing and oppressing Palestinians. That duality, however, escapes most Americans, and since the U.S. is Israel's most fervent ally, anger at Israel translates into anti-American sentiment. Thus, the terrible pictures of some Palestinians expressing joy over the New York attack.

A more reflective U.S. foreign policy cannot stop terror altogether, but it will help by reducing popular support for anti-American acts. Over time, this may prove as hard-nosed and effective as any purely military response. Canada has a unique role to play in this effort, but its comparative advantage lies in diplomacy, education, and global know-how, not guns, bombs, and spies.

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James Ron holds the Canada Research Chair in Conflict and Human Rights at McGill University's sociology department.