



Australia, Canada, and Iraq: Perspectives on an Invasion (Contemporary Canadian Issues)

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Australia, Canada, and Iraq collects essays by fifteen esteemed academics, officials, and politicians, including the prime ministers of Australia and Canada at the time of the war ? John Howard and Jean Chretien, respectively. This volume takes advantage of the perspective offered by the decade since the war to provide a clearer understanding of the Australian and Canadian decisions regarding Iraq, and indeed of the invasion itself.

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Editorial Review

Review

Canada's example, which takes the war power out of the hands of the prime minister alone, is one for Australia to consider. (*Australian Institute of International Affairs*)

About the Author

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INTRODUCTION

Jack Cunningham and Ramesh Thakur

The two long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have now come to an end, at least insofar as the involvement of Western troops is concerned. Most Americans regarded Afghanistan as a war of necessity, forced upon the United States by an armed attack in the form of terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. By contrast, many Americans and most international observers viewed Iraq as a war of choice whose justification, conduct, and consequences remain matters of intense controversy. Between them, the two wars shaped many of the contours of twenty-first century international relations to date. They helped to define the nature of contemporary warfare and armed conflict; accelerated the shift of power, wealth, and influence away from the U.S.-led Western bloc; brought an end to the post-Cold-War era of unchallengeable U.S. dominance of world affairs; and shook the foundations of the post-1945 multilateral order centred on the United Nations (U.N.). In addition, Iraq – much more than Afghanistan – inflicted considerable reputational damage on the United States with respect to its commitment to prevailing human rights standards and its competence at administering and rebuilding a defeated, occupied, and war-torn country. Not the least because of these lasting consequences, the two conflicts also compelled many long-standing U.S. allies to re-examine the bases of their relationship with the United States.

This volume originated in a conversation at the bar in Toronto's Intercontinental Hotel, at the close of a 2012 conference assessing the Canadian and Australian experiences in the recent conflict in Afghanistan. The conference was a joint endeavour of the Centre for Contemporary International History (since renamed the Bill Graham Centre for Contemporary International History) at the University of Toronto's Trinity College and Munk School, the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy at The Australian National University, and the Canadian Forces College. Looking back at the day's events, Jack Cunningham, John English, Bill Graham, Ramesh Thakur, and William Maley agreed to go ahead with a follow-up conference on the Australian and

Canadian decisions to respectively take part in and stand aside from the 2003 invasion of Iraq. They also agreed to proceed with two volumes of conference papers as part of the current series, with Maley and Cunningham to edit the volume on Afghanistan, and Thakur and Cunningham the one on Iraq. A year later, in Canberra for the conference on Iraq, they nailed down the details for the present compilation.

These volumes are rooted in a shared interest in the similarities and differences between Australia and Canada in their policies towards recent international conflicts and their foreign and security policies more broadly. Both countries are parliamentary democracies along the Westminster model, with obvious cultural ties to and affinities with Great Britain as well as each other. Both are “middle” powers. And both have complicated relationships with their American ally. In the Australian case this is defined above all by distance, in the Canadian one by intimate proximity and profound economic interdependence. The two volumes of conference papers in this series can be seen as complementary, one dealing with a case where the two governments took essentially the same decision, and one with an instance where they clearly did not.

In trying to make sense of the Australian and Canadian decisions regarding Iraq, and indeed of the invasion itself, we are inevitably constrained by the limited vistas of our historical moment. After all, a decade’s distance is very little in the historian’s schema, and affords us relatively limited perspectives. That said, it is not too soon to draw some provisional conclusions and to pose questions that can be answered more confidently once the relevant documentary record is more comprehensive than it now is. And for that, we do have some material with which to work.

The Chilcot and Hutton inquiries in Britain have provided some documentary evidence regarding British, and to some degree American, perceptions and decisions. The invasion and its aftermath have been chronicled in a number of solid journalistic accounts. Other books have made some use of interviews to treat the American and British decision-making processes. Some have examined the impact of the war on the international normative order, and on the state of nuclear arms control. And a growing memoir literature provides grist for the scholar’s mill. Among major American participants, George W. Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, and Condoleezza Rice have given us their versions of events, as has Tony Blair on the British side. As for the Australian and Canadian experiences, we now have the recollections of John Howard and Jean Chrétien. There have been occasional articles and book chapters assessing the Canadian or Australian decision, but not, we believe, much by way of comparison, and no volume like this.

Most of the chapters here are re-workings of papers presented at the 2013 Canberra conference, though there are exceptions. As noted below, the chapters by Howard and Chrétien are reprints of addresses delivered in Sydney and Toronto respectively. In addition, Kim Nossal was slated to take part in the Canberra conference, although circumstances prevented it. We have, however, included a chapter which is based on what he would have said had he been present.

We have also attempted to incorporate the perspectives of Australian and Canadian policymakers. John Howard is represented by a speech to the Lowy Institute, and Jean Chrétien by remarks at a Graham Centre conference marking the fiftieth anniversary of the election of Lester Pearson’s government. In these selections, they defend their respective decisions. Howard situates his actions in the context of the 9/11 attacks and the sense of vulnerability to terrorist attack they engendered. He concedes errors on the part of the coalition powers regarding intelligence on weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and a failure to plan for the aftermath of the invasion, but is quick to point out there was widespread agreement across the Australian political spectrum that Saddam Hussein possessed WMDs. In response to critics of military action without U.N. approval, he points to the precedent of NATO’s intervention in Kosovo and draws a contrast between those who, in his view, make a fetish of multilateralism and those who believe the nation-state must reserve the right to act independently *in extremis*. Chrétien stresses what he views as the patent inadequacy, even at

the time, of evidence for Saddam's possession of WMDs, and the dangers of a global order in which regime change without UN approval became permissible practice.

To the reflections of these decision-makers, we have added excerpts from a round-table on "Parliamentary Democracies at War" held at the Canberra conference. Here, the Honourable Bill Graham (Canadian foreign minister at the time of the invasion, and subsequently defence minister); the Right Honourable Malcolm Fraser, former Australian prime minister; and Paul Barratt, Australia's former secretary of defence, reflect on the Australian and Canadian decisions, the processes by which they were taken, and potential lessons for the future.

As for the scholarly contributions to this book, they are unapologetically eclectic in approach and standpoint. There is considerable variation among our authors in methodology and focus, although it is fair to say that all are, broadly speaking, empiricists, steering clear of the wider shores of theory. The contributors differ among themselves over the legality, morality, and prudence of invading Iraq, although none can bring themselves to defend the manner in which Saddam's overthrow and the reconstruction of Iraq were actually conducted, and the judgment of almost all is negative in varying degrees.

Several of them take a broad view of the invasion, not confined to the Canadian and Australian experiences. Ramesh Thakur's verdict on the invasion is unsparing. He depicts it as rooted in deliberate misrepresentation of the salient facts and as a catastrophe by every measure, including its own terms. He argues that the invasion and its aftermath served only to inflame jihadist sentiments and benefit Iran regionally and China globally, while dividing the United States from its European allies. He concludes that George W. Bush and his coalition partners gravely undermined the international norm against aggressive war and damaged the U.N. system to boot. But the United Nations, he writes, would have been discredited completely had it been coerced into bestowing its imprimatur on the invasion, and has been largely vindicated by subsequent developments.

Like Thakur's contribution, Roger Coate's piece about the invasion's impact on the U.S.-U.N. relationship is critical of the aggressive American exceptionalism and unilateralism associated with the second Bush administration. He contends that the Bush administration not only undermined the authority and effectiveness of the United Nations, but hampered the pursuit of its own goals in the process. U.S. and U.N. interests are more complementary than Bush administration officials knew, he continues, and the deliberate marginalization of the United Nations impaired the reconstruction of Iraq, the stabilization of the region, and the post-invasion containment of terrorism. In Coate's account, the United Nations emerges as perhaps the archetypal creation of modern American liberalism, and its discrediting as an instrument of global governance a self-inflicted blow of the first order.

Since the Australian and Canadian responses to the Anglo-American call for support diverged, it is that divergence that must be the focus of any comparative assessment. And here our authors differ in emphasis, and sometimes substance. Some emphasize deeply rooted variations in national experience and different positions on the globe and in the international system, or the dynamics of the respective Australian and Canadian alliances with the United States. Others give more weight to contingencies such as the immediate domestic political climate, the predilections of the individual leader, or the details of how the Bush administration went about the task of coalition-building.

For example, Hugh White situates John Howard's decision within Australia's long history of involvement in the wars of its imperial or quasi-imperial patrons. Given the territory it must defend, the proximity of potentially threatening powers, and distance from its powerful protectors (first Britain and then America), Australia, he argues, has joined "other people's wars" from the Boer War onward, wanting to demonstrate its

reliability as an ally in order to ensure that its allies remember and assist it in its own times of peril. Even after Richard Nixon moved to wind down the Cold War in Asia, White continues, Australia strove to assist the United States further afield, including in the Persian Gulf. He presents Australia as fearful of abandonment by its imperial protector, with Canada fearful of entrapment instead. Not having had to worry about the defence of its own neighbourhood since the United States asserted its responsibility for the security of the Western Hemisphere, Canada has tended instead to worry about being dragged into ill-judged military adventures, remote from its own interests, by its far more powerful neighbour.

Charles Sampford's analysis is similar in some ways. He notes that Australia and Canada have both historically sought to maintain independence from the United States and Britain. But over time it emerges that Australia is more preoccupied with demonstrating independence from Britain, and Canada in doing so from the United States, largely as a function of geography. Region, Sampford argues, has been important in shaping Canadian decisions about military interventions abroad. A North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member, Canada took part in NATO's action in Kosovo, but felt free to say "no" to Iraq; indeed it did so under the same prime minister. Australia's leaders, on the other hand, feel compelled to demonstrate solidarity with the United States wherever the opportunity and obligation arise, geography notwithstanding.

William Maley considers Australia's combination of distance from and dependence upon the United States, and concludes that it would have been a surprise had John Howard not agreed to send troops to Iraq. In an asymmetrical alliance, he writes, the less dependent power necessarily enjoys much more latitude in deciding when and where to come to the aid of its more dependent ally. Moreover, the latter cannot bank goodwill for past services; in honouring the perceived obligations of alliance, the salient question is always, "What have you done for me lately?" As a result, it is necessarily hard for Australia to pass up any opportunity to demonstrate its solidarity with America (harder, certainly, than it is for Canada). Maley does not look at alliance dynamics in isolation from historical context, however. He draws our attention to the 1999 East Timor crisis, when Timorese civilians and Australian peacekeepers were attacked by militias working hand-in-glove with the Indonesian military. Only after a period of apparent wavering, and indications by some American officials that the matter was not of direct concern to Washington, did the Clinton administration offer assistance. From this point forward, Maley speculates, Australia decided to yoke itself militarily more closely to the United States rather than risk isolation.

In assessing the divergent Australian and Canadian decisions, it can be tempting to move from a healthy awareness of the different histories and political cultures to a glib and reductive essentialism that attributes explanatory power to unchanging national character. This would be defined in terms of Australian "warriors" versus Canadian "peacekeepers," the former having more of an affinity for the hawks in the Bush administration, without whom there would have been no invasion at all. John Blaxland's contribution provides a healthy corrective against following such reasoning too far. He assesses the responses to 9/11 and the policies toward Iraq of both Republicans and Democrats, concluding that had the 2000 presidential election ended differently, a President Al Gore would have acted much as George W. Bush did in substance, although in a more emollient and consensual manner that would have raised fewer Canadian hackles and elicited at least a token contribution. The Canadian and Australian decisions did, he points out, reflect the preponderance of opinion within the governing party and its electoral coalition. But this was shaped by immediate contingencies and was hardly the same as deeply rooted national character, insofar as in both cases the governing party changed within a few years (though in neither case was Iraq a major electoral issue).

Taking a somewhat different view, John English argues that, at least in the Canadian case, national and even partisan traditions do matter. He situates the Chrétien government's situation within the longer history of Liberal governments' contending with issues of war and peace, with the sentiments of their own natural

political coalition tending to make involvement in military adventures electorally problematic.

As our inclusion of statements by Howard and Chrétien indicates, we are mindful of the importance of the individual leader's personality and proclivities, and that is reflected in the scholarly contributions. While there is not complete unanimity on the statecraft of either Chrétien or Howard, the former fares somewhat better in the eyes of most of our authors.

Hugh White sees Howard's own personal response to 9/11 as crucial to his actions over Iraq, and tends to agree with him that his mistaken assumptions about WMDs and the likely course of the invasion were widely shared across the spectrum. On the other hand, Charles Sampford takes him to task for claiming that there was and is widespread disagreement about the legality of invasion without a further U.N. Security Council resolution expressly authorizing the use of force. Sampford discerns a clear consensus on its illegality among serious students of international law and the laws of war, though he notes the existence of dissenting voices in Australian public life. He also chastises Howard and his colleagues for taking at face value the unqualified British and American intelligence estimates that argued Saddam had WMDs, rather than pressing for sustained and critical evaluation of the pertinent evidence.

Jean Chrétien was widely taken to task by the press and his political opponents in the run-up to the invasion for failing to stake out a consistent and coherent position. Timothy Sayle contends that not only was this holding Chrétien to a standard few leaders could meet in the face of rapidly changing events and uncertain information, but it was part of a deliberate strategy on Chrétien's part. By adopting an ambiguous stance in the months prior to the invasion, he writes, Chrétien maintained his freedom of manoeuvre in the event that the international consensus for military action that he considered a *sine qua non* for Canadian participation ever materialized. At the same time, he paved the way for an ultimate refusal by indicating to Bush and others that without U.N. approval, Canada would not take part in an invasion. The ambiguity of Chrétien's position, concludes Sayle, allowed him to remain a participant in the international debate over the merits of military action as opposed to continued inspections, and in the effort to reach a compromise on a further resolution in the United Nations.

Jack Cunningham's broadly similar analysis adds that Canadian diplomacy was initially directed toward supporting Secretary of State Colin Powell's efforts to make maximum use of multilateral instruments, and took hope from Powell's statement that full compliance by Saddam Hussein with the relevant U.N. disarmament resolutions would in itself constitute regime change. Cunningham also reminds us that the last-ditch Canadian effort at the United Nations (intended to be more discreet than it turned out to be) was a genuine attempt to forge a compromise between two sides seen as equally intransigent, and that Canadian statements made it quite plain that the onus of compliance was on Saddam, whose failure to disarm had triggered the crisis in the first instance.

Kim Nossal compares Chrétien's actions not to Howard's, but to those of a previous Canadian prime minister, Brian Mulroney, when he declined Ronald Reagan's invitation to official participation in the Strategic Defense Initiative. In the process, Nossal compels reassessment of one of the truisms of Canadian-American relations ? that the tone and manner in which Canadians reject an American overture is crucial to maintaining cordial relations. As Nossal observes, Mulroney was tactful and polite in his refusal. Chrétien was markedly less so in his, and indeed announced it to a televised session of the House of Commons, to the exuberant braying of his own members of Parliament in a distinctly raucous atmosphere and to the evident discomfort of the Cabinet minister charged with ensuring Canadian-American amity (though how much of this Chrétien anticipated and might have been expected to control is unclear). There was a short-term difference, Nossal writes, with relations between Mulroney and Reagan remaining friendly while those between the Chrétien government and the Bush White House deteriorated markedly in the short run. Over

time, however, the logic of institutionalized interdependence trumped personal pique, and relations resumed a businesslike tenor, if not a particularly affectionate one.

Of course leaders do not lead as they choose, but are inevitably constrained by the electoral climate of the day and what public opinion is prepared to tolerate. The papers here take this into consideration in assessing both the Australian and Canadian domestic contexts. In the Australian case, Ian McAllister sees public opinion as having been reasonable and pragmatic, judging actions in terms of their success or lack thereof. In his analysis, the Australian public was inclined to support Howard's decision to participate in the invasion out of a concern over the dangers of terrorism involving WMDs, with support for maintenance of the American alliance a strong secondary motivation. Once the claims about WMDs proved ill-founded, the secondary rationale proved too weak a reed to sustain public support, and it gradually eroded, not least because of effective attacks by the opposition Labor Party.

Indeed, as William Maley points out, in the short term Howard's position proved sound domestic politics. Labor leader Mark Latham's vehement attacks on President Bush were widely viewed as undignified and over-the-top, and backfired quite conspicuously in the 2004 election, where the electorate seems to have been broadly supportive of Howard's position. Howard prevailed in 2004, and was defeated in the next election, in 2007. While the situation in Iraq had indeed deteriorated between the two elections, Howard's defeat rested on other causes.

As for the Canadian situation, Sayle notes that polling data showing widespread public opposition to Canadian participation, particularly in Chrétien's home province of Quebec, but notes that public sentiment was in line with what the government already proposed to do, and in that sense not a determinant of policy.

Jack Cunningham cautions that public opinion was perhaps less hostile to war than it might have seemed, and might well have moved in a different direction given a clear lead by the government. It also seems to have distinguished between the merits of overthrowing Saddam and those of bowing to American pressure to take part, after a somewhat clumsy intervention by the American ambassador to Canada that allowed Chrétien to frame the issue as one of standing up for Canada's right to its own foreign policy.

In any event, the debate over the merits of the invasion may no longer be the stuff of headlines, but it has not fully died away in either Australia or Canada. As English points out, in Canada, Chrétien's refusal is now widely regarded as one of the defining moments of his premiership. And in Australia, Malcolm Fraser is one of a number of eminent Australians advocating a public inquiry into the war and Howard's decision. There is no reason for the debate to end in either country, and every reason for it to continue. Presumably the voices in this book will be heard as part of it.

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