

Editorial

Canada's Afghanistan Policy – From the Absurd to the Ridiculous

Last week, Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister Peter Mackay called for "a greater collective effort" in Afghanistan to assist the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to achieve victory. He made it clear that he was referring not only to other NATO countries, which he suggested were not contributing enough to the war effort. "Even non-NATO countries can do more, including ... China and Russia," he said.

Peter Mackay must be aware that there is very little support within NATO countries for the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan. In fact, by his own admission, only seven out of 37 NATO members with forces in Afghanistan are allowing their troops to go to the southern regions where most of the fighting is taking place. Several NATO countries have openly

opposed the American strategy of military conquest and have suggested that negotiations with the Taliban would be more fruitful. In fact, it is a sham to suggest that the mission is really a NATO-led operation, because NATO has never adopted a unified strategy or policy towards Afghanistan.

In the face of the unbridled desire for revenge expressed by the entire American political establishment following the events of September 11, 2001, many U.S. allies feared retaliation of one kind or another if they dared to openly oppose the American-led aggression against Afghanistan. Most, including Canada, sent troops to the areas in the north and around Kabul where little, if any, fighting was going on. However, last year the Conservative

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International Days of Action Against Israeli Apartheid

June 9 and 10 have been designated as international days of action to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem and to call for an end to the policies of Israeli apartheid.

In Canada, numerous events will be taking place across the country. These include a national day of protest at Chapters/Indigo bookstores on June 9 to urge the chain to cut its ties to Israeli apartheid. The protest is being organized by the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid, which has been holding information pickets at different Chapters/Indigo locations in Toronto for over a year. The first such picket will be held in Winnipeg at the Chapters store near Polo Park starting at 2 p.m.

Why Chapters?

Heather Reisman and Gerry Schwartz, who are the two majority shareholders of Chapters/Indigo, are also the founders of the Heseg Fund. According to the fund's website, Schwartz and Reisman "established Heseg to express gratitude and provide support to the thousands of former lone soldiers who serve annually in the Israel Defence Forces."

Heseg provides financial support for former "lone soldiers" in the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), which is responsible for committing many war crimes in the occupied Palestinian territories. "Lone soldiers" are individuals who have no family in Israel but choose to enlist in the Israeli army. Former Israeli Defence

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40 Years of Israeli Occupation

Discussing how Israel should respond to rockets being launched by Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip Shmuel Eliayhu, chief rabbi of Safad, Israel, was quoted in *The Jerusalem Post* on May 30, 2007 as saying, “If they do not stop after we kill 100, then we must kill a thousand. And if they do not stop after 1,000, then we must kill 10,000. If they still don’t stop we must kill 100,000, even a million. Whatever it takes to make them stop.”

The same article notes that Eliayhu’s father, Israel’s former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Mordechai Eliayhu “ruled that there was absolutely no moral prohibition against the indiscriminate killing of civilians during a potential massive military offensive on Gaza aimed at stopping the rocket launchings.” He presented this ruling in a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, a letter that has been widely circulated throughout Israel.

While shocking because they constitute an open call for genocide, the Eliayhus’ quotes in the *Jerusalem Post* are hardly surprising – they are the logical conclusion of the official Israeli state policy of collective punishment of the entire Palestinian people.

June 6 marks a grim anniversary – the fortieth anniversary of the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip, West Bank and East Jerusalem. Activities around the globe are being held to mark the anniversary and to highlight to the world the crimes that Israel is carrying out against the Palestinian people. [*For information on activities planned in Winnipeg, see story in this issue*]. The occupation has continued for 40 years, in violation of all international laws and norms. Two generations of Palestinian children have been born into occupation and still it continues.

For the Palestinian people, the occupation has been an attempt to crush their national aspirations. It has meant 40 years of imprisonment, of colonialism, of national humiliation and degradation. It has meant, literally, death, famine, disease, poverty and injustice. It has meant that families have been separated, farmers cut off from their land, workers from their

factories, shopkeepers from their shops, through a brutal system of checkpoints and the construction of the separation wall which runs like a jagged scar through the heart of the occupied territories.

According to the Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem, in the last six years alone, on average, two Palestinians have been killed by the IDF every day; the vast majority of these deaths are of civilians. Ten thousand Palestinians are being held as political prisoners in Israel, including over 400 children. Long before the image of prisoners in orange jumpsuits being held illegally by the Americans at Guantanamo Bay galvanized world public opinion against the so-called U.S. war on terror, Palestinians have been treated as “enemy non-state combatants”. Over 1,000 Palestinians are being held in detention without ever having been charged with an offence, without even the pretext that they have any human, civil or political rights. This in the country which describes itself repeatedly as the only democracy in the Middle East.

Since 1967, the IDF has demolished over 12,000 houses in the occupied territories, leaving 70,000 Palestinians homeless. Besides housing demolitions, the Israeli settlement policy has meant 40 per cent of the land within the occupied territories has been illegally appropriated and distributed to settlers. The average settler has a standard of living 43 times higher than the average Palestinian. Settlers are guaranteed access to running water, health care, and education. They travel on “Israeli-only roads” which are well maintained and make travel between the settlements easy and swift.

In stark contrast Palestinian families living in adjoining villages often wait years to see each other, as travel within the occupied territories is extremely difficult and requires permission from the IDF. The entire settlement system is financed by the Israeli state, which invests millions each year in maintaining and expanding the settlement infrastructure which has been constructed in clear violation of international law.

U.S. Condemned for Release of Posada Carriles

On May 9, two days before he was to stand trial on minor immigration fraud charges in El Paso, Texas, notorious terrorist Luis Posada Carriles was cleared of all charges by a U.S. federal judge. He is now a free man although his whereabouts are not currently known.

This latest manoeuvre in the case of Posada has caused an international uproar and the U.S. has been forced to offer some kind of explanation. In an open debate on terrorism in the UN Security Council two weeks ago, Cuban Ambassador Ileana Nunez and Venezuelan Ambassador Francisco Arias held the U.S. responsible for freeing Posada, who was the acknowledged mastermind behind the mid-air explosion of a Cuban airliner in October 1976, as well as many other documented crimes against Cuba and other countries.

In response to this accusation, the U.S. Ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad, said that the U.S. is bound by its laws not to extradite Posada to either Venezuela, from where he escaped from custody while facing charges for the 1976 bombing, or to Cuba, the country where he was born. The U.S. law Khalilzad is referring to is one that forbids extradition to a country where the accused is likely to face torture. The justification of this law in the case of Posada is highly ironic, considering that the U.S. military is well known as an inflictor of torture in Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, and many other places, as well as a supporter of many regimes where torture has been openly practiced, while there are no instances of

torture by the Cuban or Venezuelan governments or their militaries.

On May 22, the counselor for the Cuban permanent mission to the UN, Rodolfo Benitez, formally responded to Khalilzad's comments. He pointed out that the U.S. had allowed Posada to freely enter its territory, and had protected him during the months he lived there as an illegal immigrant. He also questioned why Posada was charged only with minor immigration crimes when the authorities had all the evidence necessary to charge him with being a terrorist. Even now, after his full exoneration, Benitez pointed out, the U.S. has all the legal mechanisms in place to re-arrest him.

Benitez also denounced the continuing campaign of terror against Cuba from within the U.S., primarily in Miami, and the huge amounts of money that are raised to commit these acts against Cuba. "Bank accounts that finance terrorism are operating openly and normally; terrorists are recruited; the acquisition of weapons is permitted, as is the use of territory by those who finance, plan and commit acts of terrorism against Cuba," he stated.

Posada Carriles participated not only in attacks against Cuba, but also in other actions, such as Operation Condor, a campaign of kidnappings, torture, assassinations and forced disappearances carried out by Latin American dictatorships with the backing of the CIA. He was also responsible for a string of bombings of Havana hotels in 1997, in one of which an Italian-Canadian, Fabio Di Celmo, was killed.

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government of Stephen Harper submitted to U.S. pressure and agreed to send Canadian forces to take over from the Americans in the region around Kandahar and Canadian casualties began to soar.

In turn, this has led to growing opposition within Canada to Canada's participation in the war against Afghanistan and to mounting demands to bring the troops home. The Conservatives, finding themselves between a rock and a hard place, are desperately searching for a way out that can please both the Americans and the Canadian people. This, of course, is an impossibility; hence the absurdity of the Conservative policy on Afghanistan.

However, Mackay's call for China and Russia to assist the U.S. in conquering Afghanistan goes beyond the absurd to the ridiculous. It is no secret that the U.S. war in Afghanistan is aimed primarily at Russia and China. The "Bush Doctrine" announced by U.S. President George W. Bush on June 1, 2002

openly lists Russia and China as the main threats to U.S. "national interests" and threatens them with preemptory nuclear strikes if they dare to challenge U.S. military supremacy.

For their part, high-ranking Russian generals have openly gloated about the difficulties facing the Americans in Afghanistan, reminding them that the Afghans defeated a much more powerful Red Army and that no one in history – not even Alexander the Great – has ever succeeded in defeating the Afghan people and occupying their country. Both the Russians and the Chinese view the U.S. predicament in Afghanistan and Iraq as an opportunity to advance their own imperialist interests in various parts of the world and to defeat the American attempts to encircle their countries with satellite states and military bases. Calling on Russia and China to assist the U.S. in establishing a uni-polar world under its dictate leaves Mackay looking extremely naïve, at best, or, at worst, a fool.

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Minister Shaul Mofaz, architect of last summer's invasion of Lebanon, spoke at a Heseg ceremony in December 2005. "Encouraging and supporting young individuals from abroad [who enlist in the IDF] directly supports the morale of the IDF," he said.

The *Canadian Jewish News* reported that Schwartz and Reisman were honoured for their efforts in support of the Israeli military at a recent ceremony to honour a lone soldier killed last summer during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The deceased soldiers' platoon commander presented the couple with the soldier's gun as an expression of thanks.

The Heseg board of directors includes active and retired high-ranking Israeli military personnel, including:

- Maj. General Doron Almog, the former head of Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip. Almog was in charge of the Israeli military southern command when a one-ton bomb was dropped on a house in Gaza in an attempt to assassinate a Hamas leader. Fourteen civilians, including nine children, were killed in the attack. Almog avoided arrest for war crimes in London in 2005 by refusing to disembark from a flight after being tipped off that British police would seize him and charge him as soon as he set foot on British soil.
- General Yitzhak Eitan, the International Chairman of the Association for the Wellbeing of Israel's Soldiers and head of the IDF Central Command from 2000-2003.
- General Elazar Stern, who served as Deputy Commander of the IDF Central Brigade on the Israeli-Lebanon border. He also served as Commander of the Officers' School
- Shabtai Shavit, the head of Mossad, the Israeli secret service, from 1989-1996.
- Lt. Colonel Mike Hartman, head of the marksmanship and sharpshooters section of the IDF.

Canadian members on the Heseg board include:

- Heather Reisman, President and CEO of Indigo Books and Music Inc.
- Gerry Schwartz, President and CEO of ONEX and a director of Indigo Books and Music Inc.
- Robert Pritchard, President and CEO of Torstar Productions (the Toronto Star)
- Irving Abella, faculty member at York University
- Moshe Ronen, Vice-President of the World Jewish Congress, Chairman of the Board of the Canadian Jewish Congress and Co-Chair of the Canada-Israel Committee.

The Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid has called on all Canadians to boycott Chapters/Indigo until Reisman and Schwartz publicly announce they have ended their association with the Heseg Foundation.

Picket Chapters June 9!
Get it to cut its ties to
Israeli apartheid!

Chapters Polo Park
(659 Empress)

Saturday, June 9, 2-4 pm

Modern Communism

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