

JEREMY KINSMAN: DIPLOMATICALLY SPEAKING

## Peaceable Canadians. Who, nous?

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A country's image and self-image are important determinants in international relations. Canada's image abroad is that of a successful sanctuary of peace and order in a dangerous world.

In the past, we had a reputation as warriors, maybe even hired toughs — we certainly punched above our weight in the two world wars — but today we are seen more as peaceable and helpful fixers, if not overly consequential.

Even though our principal international engagement at the moment is a risky military operation in Afghanistan, this contribution and our sacrifices there are less noticed around the world because of the propensity these days for each country's media to cover only its national contingents and ignore the activity of others.

Meanwhile, our self-image shares the view others have of us, especially concerning our core role as international "peacekeepers."

But where do reality and myth intersect?

Taking stock on the home front, urban violence from handguns is up. So, too, looks to be the perennial issue of hockey fights and retaliation. Then, there is the annual seal slaughter, which so shocks the international community because of its apparent cruelty and the fact that it doesn't seem to fit with our national character.

Do we need a reality check?

### The myth of peacekeeping

When it comes to Afghanistan, the discussion I hear, especially in the university arena, suggests that many Canadians are very uneasy with the deployment of force, even to the point of having difficulty seeing force as a legitimate part of our repertoire of international tools.

The notion of Canada as peacekeeper or even peacemaker has become deeply ingrained in our psyche. But it has not caught up with the darker reality of today.

Classic peacemaking in the original sense of the UN emergency force in the Sinai in 1956 always relied on the parties to a conflict wanting peace, which the peacekeepers could then supervise. The moment one of them ceased to want peace, the lightly armed peacekeepers are out of there, as happened to UNEF in 1967.

After the tragedies of Rwanda and Srebrenica, many in the international community called for something more — a UN-sanctioned force that can actually use force, especially to protect civilians in grave danger.

Winning international agreement for the authorization of such operations has been Canada's signature policy theme at the UN for several years now.

Objection to this came mainly from non-democratic countries that were alarmed at the prospect of national sovereignty being overridden by an international authority. When the Bush administration cited protection of civilians as a core reason for having invaded Iraq (once the concerns about weapons of mass destruction and connections to al-Qaeda were debunked), these suspicions became hardened.

But progress in reaching an international consensus on a responsibility to protect is gaining ground. Even countries that have been committed in the past to non-interference in the internal affairs of states — like China, Algeria, Pakistan and several in Latin America — now seem to recognize that there are special situations when the international community must confront "bad guys" out there in order to save lives. And to do this, there must be military credibility behind this stance.

### Fighting words

This policy of intervention when necessary has been Canada's position at the UN for some time now. But it does seem to jar with the self-image Canadians often carry of our military's peacekeeping role.

We need to remember that we went to Afghanistan because al-Qaeda had launched a murderous global jihad from that failed state. What's more, we went there as part of a thorough international consensus to enable non-Taliban Afghans to rebuild their country and its governance.

Now that the Taliban is back fighting NATO forces and the international aid effort, seeing that as interfering in the sovereign affairs of a Muslim state, there are misgivings at home about our military engagement.

Apart from an emerging sense that the whole operation is in growing difficulty, I hear two main arguments for wanting Canadian forces out of Afghanistan.

One line is highly skeptical and maintains that we are only there to please the U.S. It is even said that our being in Afghanistan indirectly supports the U.S. occupation of Iraq.

The truth is actually the opposite: The Chrétien government opposed the U.S. invasion of Iraq (unlike the Stephen Harper-led opposition at the time), because we didn't believe the WMD allegations.

I remember being asked by American officials in September 2002, "How would you Canadians know what's going on in Iraq?"

The answer was simple; we paid attention to the assessments of both the CIA and the UN inspectors under Hans Blix, which the Bush administration itself chose to ignore. (Some, like military historian Jack Granatstein, prefer to believe that Chrétien stayed out to placate Quebec "pacifism;" it's just not so.)

### **War is hockey**

The other line of argument for wanting the Canadian military out of the line of fire is more idealistic. It holds that Canadians deliver aid, not deadly force. We do need to aid the Afghans. But the sad fact is that there won't be aid without security.

That many Canadians don't see the need or appropriateness of our using force at all is not in line with our history.

Poet and hockey scholar Douglas Beardsley reminds me that English poet Robert Graves admiringly described our soldiers in Europe during the world wars as the original crazy Canucks.

Canadians are no strangers to violence, it may even be part of our national psyche. Without stretching the point too far, look at the current flare-up over fighting in our national sport. NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman says fighting in hockey is "part of the game."

Of course other professional sports — international rugby or big-league soccer for example — can be just as tough but don't tolerate fighting. Their stars are protected by the rules, not so-called enforcers.

It's hard to escape the conclusion that the NHL and its trophy owners stage fights for their entertainment content because that is how they read our marketplace.

Beardsley suggests we are probably just divided on these issues, and that the divisions may live within each of us: The fighting on the ice is a harmless safety valve, which permits us to be the Quiet Canadians the rest of the time.

He may be right about this. On the other hand it may be that we are simply not as peaceable as we think we are.

### **How others see us**

To have a coherent foreign policy a country ought to provide a coherent image to the world. We may be able to ignore the violent goings-on in our own makeup, but others won't and hypocrisy is not a trait that travels well on the international scene.

When I was ambassador to Italy, it seemed that every third grader in that country sent a card on the occasion of our annual seal slaughter, asking why Canadians had to club 300,000 little animals to death in front of their mothers.

Staged correspondence, of course. But the point is that on this one, our image abroad is going down the tubes.

Over the decades, there isn't an argument I haven't heard from Newfoundland and Quebec in favour of this "hunt." (The seals eat precious fish, the hunt is regulated and at least as humane as most abattoirs, the herd needs culling, it's an economic necessity and way of life, etc. etc.)

This is mostly evasion. As for economic necessity, is this what we're all about? I don't blame the sealers themselves any more than I blame the hockey enforcers who have trouble skating backwards.

But surely our modern economy can do better by them. Newfoundland today is much more about Hibernia and offshore expertise than whacking seals.

The economic benefits from the hunt total something like \$30 million a year tops, a small part of a Newfoundland economy worth about \$15 billion. What's more, we're about to get whacked ourselves with boycotts on West Coast salmon, promoted by the likes of the U.S. Humane Society, which are going to cost us considerably more than \$30 million.

The only argument behind this damn "hunt" I've ever been able to make sense out of is that we live in a complicated federation that requires a whole bunch of trade-offs among people with different ideas, perhaps especially during minority governments.

To be conflicted is normal in a complex and changing environment.

But to function effectively, we need more candid and thorough debate, particularly, I would argue, of the role the so-called peaceful Canadian in a troubled and violent world.

This includes how we handle the serious international responsibilities that engage us in Afghanistan.

We are probably also going to have to debate how best we project Canada's modern image abroad in a competitive world, which means coming to terms with the costs to Canada of the very sad and outdated seal hunt.

We'll probably never resolve fighting in hockey. Maybe it is just who we are.

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LETTERS:

**Bravo Jeremy,**

I remember you and your wife from our days in Rome. You were always a gentleman and now a scholar. I look forward to your insights and articles. CBC is benefiting.

—Jon F Klaus | Paris, France

**My sources told me that in 2002 Al-Qaeda made an effort to enter S. Korea.** S. Korean intell was expecting such an effort for two reasons.

- 1) S. Korea's partnership with the U.S. military on the Korean peninsula.
- 2) Many people from the Middle - East work in Korea as guest workers.

Al - Qaeda did not succeed primarily because S. Korea Intell did not let Al - Qaeda get started plus the guest workers really did not want to cooperate with Al - Qaeda. S. Korea has the capability to back up what it needs to do for security and this is a fact some people forget.

You are correct in saying that " peace keeping " in ideal life means the Canadian soldier stands around, plays nice and hands out food. In reality it just is not so.

Before you have a setting for peace both antagonists have to agree to it. Both the Taliban and Al - Qaeda don't want it. So I guess we have wear them down to the point where it is pointless for them to continue.

—Russ Bender | Seoul/Calgary

**To deny the violent nature of the world in general is to delude ourselves.** To hold ourselves above that reality is equally naive. I cannot believe the furor that has erupted over the killing of seals.

I see this as the new fashion in protest, which is generally held by the educated middle class, who forget the foundations upon which their societies were predicated.

We, in the first world, protest the wars that ensure the free flow of oil while we drive our SUVs and complain about the price of gas at the pump. Hypocrisy! Perhaps we should just be honest with ourselves and admit that we aren't going to give up our opulence, even if it means killing people in far off lands.

We are not unlike the seals we kill for blubber and fur. We're both at the top of the food chain, but our prey occupies the third world and can only be seen as a competitive threat to our real meat - oil and natural resources.

—Jon | Edmonton

**There are two things I cannot agree with about your article.** I can visualize that your philosophy of appeasement in the diplomatic positions you were posted to, had value for Canadians in the international circumstances of the time.

However, appeasement has its limits, especially when people who are the most affected, are the least vocal and yet may have the best insight, are expected to render the biggest sacrifice. The experience of Deborah from NL is accurate and she should be listened to. Mary from BC could attend a killing session at a slaughterhouse (in case you ask, I have), or move to the region Deborah is from and demonstrate with the resources available to those people how to do it better, or listen to what Deborah is saying.

The second thing I disagree with is according any thanks to the Chretien led government for not sending our armed forces into Iraq with the Americans and the British. They may have opposed it, as you say, but I remember them teetering on the ultimate decision due to the pressure from the American government and others from this country.

What ultimately kept Canada out of that quagmire were the Canadian people in their tens of thousands who attended the anti-war rallies across this country. At the demonstration I went to in Winnipeg it was a minus 25C, windy, winter day and there were more than 5000 people attending. Because of these demonstrations our sitting politicians were more concerned with what would occur in the next election. The credit and the thanks belongs to the Canadian people and their society.

—Phil Zizman | Winnipeg

**Thank you to Mr. Jeremy Kinsman for helping to put all of these issues into perspective.** As a former natural resource management student, I agree that the commercial seal slaughter on the east coast is cruel and unnecessary, as is our government's support for other sectors of the fur industry, including the use of steel-jaw leghold traps and fur factory farming.

We should have moved beyond the killing animals for their fur long ago. I think the Canadian government should implement a fair sealing license retirement program and compensate the sealers for lost revenue resulting from the closures of the seal "fishery" (as the DFO refers to it even though harp seals are marine mammals, not fish).

Many Canadian and international vets, including humane slaughter experts, have determined that the seal slaughter is cruel and poorly regulated. In addition, many scientists outside of the Canadian government have criticized the management, inaccurate population estimates, and high quotas and have determined the slaughter to be "unsustainable".

There's little doubt these warm winters will continue to destroy the ice that the seals depend on for giving birth. Year after year of low "pup production" due to climate change and commercial hunting will change the age structure of the population and cause a decrease over the long term. It's time that this seal hunt which brings in so little income be ended for good so Canada can continue to retain its image as a peaceful, humane and environmentally responsible nation.

— Mary | Bamfield, B.C.

**It was refreshing to read Jeremy Kinsman's article**, "Peaceable Canadians". I have forwarded it to many of my friends, as it is rare to read a story by someone who has no axe to grind (or hahapik to swing).

I do believe that Canadians are a peaceable people, notwithstanding those who wish to continue with a brutal and brutalizing "tradition" like the seal hunt.

—Helen Schiele | Kelowna, B.C.

**While there is much to be agreed on, the portions of history he presents as fact with respect to why Canadian Forces are fighting in Afghanistan are not some of those.** Mr. Kinsman's comments in respect of that history stand the historical record on its head and represent a heavily redacted version.

As a member of Canada's diplomatic corp, surely he is aware that with respect to the events following 9/11, the existing Afghanistan government (the Taliban) offered to turn members of al Qaeda over to an 'international tribunal' provided that the USA provided some evidence of involvement - a not unusual requirement in international relations, especially where extradition treaties are not in existence.

That the USA refused to do so is also part of the historical record. It is also noteworthy, and something that Mr. Kinsman also neglects to mention, that the Taliban government were, only a few short years previous, being 'wined and dined' by the US administration which was trying to get permission for a pipeline for UNOCAL that would run through Afghanistan.

That the subsequent refusal by the Afghan government to build the pipeline is also pivotal in the change in relations and the subsequent 'targetting' of the Taliban government. What Mr. Kinsman also fails to do is place what is happening today in Afghanistan - and, indeed, in Iraq - in any historical context.

In short, why is and has the West been involved in that part of the world, and what in particular drives that continued involvement? Although heavily redacted and rewritten to conform with today's myths regarding 'freedom', 'democracy' and the 'humanitarian spirit', the first world war had little or nothing to do with those notions but everything to do about 'colonial empires' and access to the resources thereof upon which the colonial powers were heavily dependent. Indeed, the second world war can also be framed in this context.

In summary, the adage that 'those who ignore or fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it' may be modified in the context of Mr. Kinsman's comments to 'those who redact the historical record are doomed to repeat those parts redacted'. The lesson to be learned - if there exists one - is that war does not define a nation's 'coming of age' as many of our current leaders would have us believe, but represents instead a failure of those leaders to achieve political results through peaceful means. And that is the hallmark of political skill and success. Not the going to war.

— Bob Hagman | Enderby, B.C.

**I really would have expected a better, more researched commentary from Jeremy Kinsman** regarding the seal hunt.

I generally agree with his thoughts and in this article I agree both with this assessment of our current foreign policy regarding conflicts and the whole hockey violence issue.

However, I don't agree that the seal hunt is either "sad" or "outdated". The animal rights organizations are spreading more misinformation again this year. The hunt is no more cruel or barbaric than what takes place inside slaughterhouses, but no cameras are allowed inside slaughterhouses, whereas the hunt is out on the ice for all to see. And the sight of blood on pristine white icefloes has quite a vivid sensory impact. That does not mean it is cruel. It has been studied time and again, and unbiased veterinarians have determined that it is indeed a humane hunt.

We do not, nor have we for many years, harvested whitecoats, despite the fact that the picture of the whitecoat is front and center on placards, websites, and other propaganda used by the organizations. I can only assume that it's a big money-maker for them.

The seal is not taken only for its coat with the rest of the carcass left to rot. Its coat is used, yes. But so is the meat (ever have flipper pie?). And in recent years there is a fast-growing industry in Omega-3 Seal Oil capsules, rendered from the animal, that provide us with much heralded omega 3 fatty acids.

There may not be a huge impact economically when you compare the monetary value of the hunt to the overall economy of the province, but tell that to a sealer who stands to lose 1/3 of his annual income if the hunt is banned. These sealers mostly come from out-port communities whose economy has been ravaged for many reasons, not the least of which is the decline in the fishery. In St. John's there would be virtually no impact from banning the hunt. In coastal communities of the Northern Peninsula or Labrador, it would be quite a different thing.

The threatened boycotts of Canadian seafoods are being made by people who have no understanding of the hunt, who have been spoonfed nonsense from the IFAW, the American Humane Society and Greenpeace.

Surely Mr. Kinsman, you aren't suggesting that we surrender to this culture of lies and misinformation? We refused to buy into Bush's lies concerning WMD in Iraq. Different issues, sure. But isn't it the same principal?

—Deborah Burton | Mount Pearl, NL

**Kudos to Jeremy Kinsman for his article** (Diplomatically Speaking, Peaceable Canadians. Who, nous?)!

It is truly commendable that Mr. Kinsman's insight includes the animals, who are so much a part of the peaceful world that everyone on this planet should ideally be striving for. Wars waged against humans in far away lands are sadly becoming a part of our Canadian persona, to join the spectre of the annual, cruel ritual killings on Canada's east coast.

Thank you, Mr. Kinsman, for so eloquently conveying the truth for your readers to consider.

—Sinikka Crosland | Westbank, B.C.

**More than just 'getting it right'** with the international scene (at least some Canadians pay attention), the barbarism of hockey (the great sport doesn't have to be that way) and the brutality of the seal slaughter (the red on our flag isn't supposed to be blood), Jeremy forces us to confront an important question: just who do we want to be?

Figuring out the correct answer to that question is the only way this country will salvage its reputation and future which have become the playthings of unprincipled politicians and inert voters.

Guess that's why it's become deMOCKracy.

—Prad Basu | Shawnigan Lake, B.C.

