

The Pacifism of Fools

It is hard to avoid the sinking feeling that former NDP federal secretary and national campaign chairman Gerald Caplan was speaking for his party and its current leader, Thomas Mulcair, in the Globe and Mail on April 17. Caplan wrote that our only problem with Muslim terrorists is their objection to America's dispute with Saddam Hussein, after he seized Kuwait in 1990, was expelled from it, and defied 17 United Nations Security Council resolutions in support of the ceasefire at the end of the Gulf War. Caplan cited Osama bin Laden, entirely neutrally, when he denounced the "hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children who died from lack of food and medicine due to American sanctions;" the founder of al Qaeda, he explained, "resented the deployment of American forces throughout the Gulf states, particularly in his homeland, Saudi Arabia."

Caplan further claimed that "Canadians were given the same reasons by Michel Zihaf-Bibeau, who murdered Corporal Nathan Cirillo at the War Memorial in Ottawa [that] his actions were spurred by Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq." Of course, that isn't the same thing at all. Bin Laden was speaking in 2001, in the wake of the attacks he directed against the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon, at which time there was no Canadian (or American) military involvement in Afghanistan; Canada's only involvement in Iraq had been ten years before in an operation approved by the United Nations, NATO, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, and the Palestinian Authority (led by Yasser Arafat, who purported to donate blood to assist victims of bin Laden's terrorist assault on the U.S.).

Apart from the fantastic exaggeration of the effect of international sanctions on Saddam Hussein, imposed by an almost unanimous United Nations for his violations of international law (hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children did

not die, and food and medicine were largely exempted from the sanctions, which were porous anyway); and apart also from the Swiss cheese of inconsistencies created by Caplan's explication of the motives for these massacres of innocent people (as bin Laden acknowledged them to be), are we to understand the former NDP campaign chairman attaches some credence and approval to these motives? Practically the only country that dissented from the eviction of Iraq from Kuwait was Jordan, whose opposition was based on King Hussein's desire not to antagonize his Iraqi neighbour, not any approval of Saddam's seizure of Kuwait.

Caplan is on safer ground alleging the hostility of Islamist militants to various longstanding U.S. policies, including recognition (along with the rest of the United Nations Security Council and most of its members) of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, as well as a modest American military presence in the Middle East, invariably at the request of the governments of the host countries, including several of the Gulf states, most conspicuously Saudi Arabia. The countries that requested American military collaboration did so because they felt threatened by the ideological and sectarian soul mates of bin Laden, which was understandable given the attempted assassination of the Saudi royal family at the principal mosque in Mecca in 1979, and many other infiltrations. If Caplan believes that the United States has no right to defend what it considers to be its strategic interests when asked to do so by sovereign governments in the Arab world, and has no right to avenge itself against groups that have murdered thousands of its civilians in vile acts of terrorism, he is enunciating a version of pacifism that is entirely original.

Even Gandhi accepted the legitimacy of military action in certain circumstances (he had little objection to the great Japanese offensive in the Pacific starting in 1941), as did Nelson Mandela, former commander of "The Spear of the Nation."

Caplan has a point to the extent that he regards as simplistic the George W. Bush-Stephen Harper imputation of objections to democracy as the Muslim terrorists' sole motive in their terrorist attacks on the West. But I believe it is widely understood that bin Laden and other terrorists have vehemently objected to any Western cultural influence in the Muslim world and have disputed the right of the Arab powers to develop military relations with the West, the U.S. in particular.

The readership of the *Globe and Mail*, and the democratic world generally, are not truth-starved and were not gasping in ignorance of this point awaiting enlightenment from the former NDP campaign chairman. Neither Bush nor Harper have denied this, and while I am not an apologist for them, they are entitled to mention other factors, and their record in countering terrorism has been very defensible. Caplan might wish to recall the bloodthirsty and blood-curdling videos that bin Laden released in the year following the 9/11 assault, promising much more of the same. Instead, despite his professed desire to die righteously and go to his reward in paradise, terrorist attacks in the West have been comparatively few, and bin Laden hid like an animal until he was found and executed by American forces in Pakistan. Doubtless, bin Laden objected to that American action too.

Caplan goes on to quote, again with matter-of-fact neutrality, Richard Reid, the shoe bomber who tried to blow up a commercial airliner bound from Paris to Miami in 2001 "to help (expel) the oppressive American forces from the Muslim lands," and one of the terrorists who blew up 202 tourists in Bali in 2001 in "revenge" for "what Americans have done to Muslims." (The Bali bombs killed 88 Australians, 38 Indonesians, 27 British citizens, and seven Americans, so it was a rather poorly targeted act of vengeance on Americans.)

Caplan even dredges up Mir Aimal Kasi, who attacked several people in front of the CIA headquarters in 1993 as "retaliation" for "American support of Israel." He quotes the

Guardian, a more anti-American news outlet even than Al Jazeera, to ascribe the evolution of the Houthi movement – bankrolled and supplied by Iran in the Yemeni civil war – from peaceful coexistence to its present militancy, because of the “2002 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.” Finally, the punch-line: ISIS (a “brutal movement”), is responding to “the humiliation that Muslims have suffered at the hands of foreign powers and local dictators ever since the First World War.” And: “Are there hard lessons here for Canada and its allies?”

I don't think so. I think we knew all that, but the humiliations did not begin in 1918; they started with the expulsion of the Moors from France after the Battle of Tours in 732, continued through the expulsion from Spain, the repulse of the Turks from the gates of Vienna in 1529 and 1683 (all defeats of naked Muslim aggression), the French and British seizure of Egypt in the Napoleonic Wars, the colonization of North Africa in the Nineteenth Century, and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and Anglo-French carve up of Arabia after 1918. The same sense of humiliation assimilated the British, American, and French discovery of oil in the Middle East cheerfully enough, but has never really accepted the Maronite Christians of Lebanon, nor other Christians in the Muslim world, much less a Jewish state.

We know all that too, and Stephen Harper and even George W. Bush know that. The solution for these antagonisms and the violence that results from them is better government in most of the Muslim world. But does Caplan, a learned authority on the Rwanda genocide, recommend Western appeasement of terrorists, the abandonment of the Muslim world to its most extreme inhabitants and the renunciation of any legitimate Western interest in it, including its Christian and Jewish minorities? Has he similarly no concern for the fate of nuclear non-proliferation, the region's pro-Western governments, Europe and Japan's oil supply, or the existence of a Jewish state in any borders? Where, if at all, do

humanitarian considerations fit into this world view?

What is Caplan's plan of action for all these problems, and will the real Thomas Mulcair please stand up with him and stop waffling about helping refugees and avoiding mission creep? These criminally diseased Islamist lunatics are attacking all civilization, including Muslim and Western civilization. We can't just dump it on the Americans and respond with blankets, spam, pamphlets, rosewater, and sanctimonious obfuscation.

First published in the