

Afghanistan Was Based on Lies. Will the Militarists Apologize?

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The quick collapse of the US-backed government in Afghanistan has revealed how little ordinary people should trust Canada’s military, arms industry and associated ideological supporters. Their justifications for war, their claims of progress and then victory have proven to be no more than propaganda and lies.

Canada’s biggest military deployment since World War II, more than [40,000](#) Canadian troops fought in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014. Canada spent [\\$20 billion](#) on the military operations and related aid mission and over [200,000 Afghan](#) civilians and combatants were killed in two decades of fighting. As I [detailed Monday](#), Canada engaged in significant violence and war crimes in the central Asian country. Canadian special forces participated in highly unpopular night-time assassination raids and a JTF2 member said he felt his commanders “[encouraged](#)” them to commit war crimes in Afghanistan.

The reasons presented for Canada’s war in Afghanistan were to fight fundamentalists, build democracy and support women’s rights. These rationales never added out.

Just before Canada ramped up its fighting in Kandahar in 2006 Canadian troops invaded Haiti to overthrow the elected government there. Five hundred Canadian soldiers backed violent rebels — Haiti’s Taliban, if you like — who employed rape as a means of political control. A study in the prestigious *Lancet* medical journal revealed there were [35,000 rapes](#) in the Port-au-Prince area in the 22 months after the overthrow of the elected government. So much for advancing women’s rights.

The other supposed motivation for the invasion and occupation was to weaken Al Qaeda and Jihadist forces. As Canadian troops wound down their occupation of Afghanistan a half dozen Canadian fighter jets bombed Libya. With a Canadian general overseeing the war and Canadian naval vessels helping out, NATO helped rebels in the east of the country opposed to Muammar Gadhafi’s secular government. A year and a half before the war a Canadian intelligence report described eastern Libya as an “[epicentre](#) of Islamist extremism” and said “extremist cells” operated in the anti-Gadhafi stronghold. In fact, during the bombing, noted *Ottawa Citizen* military reporter David Pugliese, Canadian air force members privately joked they were part of “[al-Qaida’s](#) air force”. Lo and behold hardline Jihadists were the major

beneficiaries of the war, taking control of significant portions of the country.

If fighting Jihadists, building democracy and defending women's rights were not Canada's main objectives in Afghanistan what was?

Supporting the US was the main reason Canada was fighting. "Washington's reactions tended to be the exclusive consideration in almost all of the discussions about Afghanistan," explains *The Unexpected War: Canada In Kandahar*. "The political problem, of course, was how to support Washington in its war on terror without supporting the war in Iraq. The answer to the problem was the so-called 'Afghan solution'." Former Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham explained "there was no question, every time we talked about the Afghan mission, it gave us cover for not going to Iraq."

But there's more to it than that. The military saw the conflict in Afghanistan as a way to increase its profile. There was a surge of martial patriotism in Canada with initiatives such as Highway of Heroes and Project Hero. In the mid-2000s every province adopted a [special licence](#) plate to signify the driver is a veteran.

The military saw Afghanistan as a way to assert its warfighting bona fides. As Chief of the Defence Staff Rick Hillier infamously proclaimed: "[We are](#) going to Afghanistan to actually take down the folks that are trying to blow up men and women ... we're not the public service of Canada, we're not just another department. We are the Canadian Forces, and our job is to be able to kill people."

The Canadian Forces have a predilection for war. As basically all but Canadian special forces had been withdrawn from Afghanistan, the Chief of the Defence Staff publicly demanded a new war. "[We have](#) some men and women who have had two, three and four tours and what they're telling me is 'Sir, we've got that bumper sticker. Can we go somewhere else now?'" General Walter Natynczyk told Canadian Press in 2012. "You also have the young sailors, soldiers, airmen and women who have just finished basic training and they want to go somewhere and in their minds it was going to be Afghanistan. So, if not Afghanistan, where's it going to be? They all want to serve."

Various think tanks and militarist organization such as the Conference of Defense Associations as well as academics writing on military issues benefited from millions of dollars in public funds. The war justified an increase in the size of the military and a major spike in military spending.

Private security firms did well in Afghanistan. Conflict in that country helped propel Montréal's Garda's to become the biggest privately held security firm in the world with some 80,000 employees today.

Military service contractors such as SNC Lavalin and ATCO also expanded their involvement with the Canadian Forces. During the war in Afghanistan Canadian Commercial Corporation president Marc Whittingham wrote in the *Hill Times*, "[there is](#) no better trade show for defence equipment than a military mission." The crown corporation has expanded its role in the international weapons trade.

On Monday The Intercept reported that the stock price of the top five US arms firms rose nearly ten fold since US President George W. Bush signed the Authorization for Use of Military Force on September 18, 2001. In ["\\$10,000](#) Invested in Defense Stocks When

Afghanistan War Began Now Worth Almost \$100,000” Jon Schwarz notes that these companies’ stock prices increase was 58% greater than the gains of the overall New York Stock Exchange.

Boeing, Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and General Dynamics all have Canadian subsidiaries. The US-based firms are not simply branch plants. They do research in Canada, have offices near Parliament Hill and hire former top Canadian military officials. A number of them do international business through their Canadian divisions. General Dynamics Canada, for instance, has the largest ever Canadian export contract selling Light Armoured Vehicles to Saudi Arabia. Tracing its Canadian history to 1948, General Dynamics has ties to Canadian educational institutions, politicians and the CF. It has over [2,000](#) employees and does research and development work.

The stock price of the biggest Canadian-based arms firm, CAE, has also risen sharply since 2001. It [trains](#) US pilots as well as the operators of Predator and Reaper drones. The Montréal-based company openly talks about profiting from increased US military spending. “[Le patron](#) de CAE veut profiter de la hausse des budgets de l’armée américaine” (CAE boss wants to take advantage of rising US military spending), read a 2018 *La Presse* headline.

The war in Afghanistan was good for the arms industry. It also bolstered the Canadian military. But the quick unraveling of 20-years of war and occupation ought to sap some of the power of Canada’s military, arms companies and associated ideological institutions. The quick collapse of the US- and Canadian-backed Afghan military and government proves they should not be trusted. Their primary goal is, and always has been, to benefit the military-industrial complex, not to improve the lives of people in other countries. Or to tell the truth to Canadians.

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