

## Gen. Walt Natynczyk led 35,000 U.S. troops in Iraq, 2004

By Richard Sanders, coordinator, Coalition to Oppose the Arms Trade.

During his three decades of military service, Canada's Chief of Defence—Lt. Gen. Walter Natynczyk—has led soldiers in Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo and East Timor.<sup>1</sup> However, Natynczyk's fighting career reached its climax in 2004, during his year-long stint in Baghdad, Iraq.

Throughout 2004, while embedded in the highest levels of command of Multi-National Corps–Iraq (MNC-I), Natynczyk led 35,000 troops fighting throughout the country. Working first as its Deputy Director of Strategy, Policy and Plans and then as its Deputy Commanding General,<sup>2</sup> he helped lead the MNC-I mission to conduct “offensive operations to defeat remaining non-compliant forces and neutralize destabilizing influences in Iraq.”<sup>3</sup>

In short, the MNF-I was the U.S.-led coalition fighting the Iraq war. In January 1, 2010, the MNF-I officially changed its name to United States Forces–Iraq.

General Natynczyk's leadership in the Iraq war contradicts one of Canada's most cherished misconceptions: that the Liberal governments of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin defiantly stood up to President George Bush by refusing to participate in the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq.

This popular misbelief is a corollary of the national myth that Canada is a global force for peace. One way to debunk this cultural chimera is to publicly expose the fact that Canada has in fact actively been aiding and abetting the Iraq war since its very inception.

Natynczyk exemplifies the incongruity between this country's peaceful self-image and the grim reality that Canada has helped wage war in Iraq.

After attending the ‘prestigious’ U.S. Army War College, Natynczyk was—like his predecessor, Chief of Defence Rick Hillier—honoured by being appointed to become the Deputy Commanding General of the U.S. Army's III Corps.

Based at Fort Hood, Texas, III Corps is the “premier Corps in the Army” with warfighters “prepared for



While on exchange with the U.S. Army, Lt. Gen. Walt Natynczyk was the first of three Canadian Generals to serve as Deputy Commander of Multi-National Corps–Iraq.



full spectrum operations in support of Joint, Combined and Interagency missions” that are “offensive in nature.”<sup>4</sup>

Reluctant to believe that Canada has helped lead the Iraq war, Canadians might strain to preserve the nation's delusory peacekeeping mirage by imagining that Natynczyk's key role in Iraq had somehow escaped their government's attention, just as it had es-

caped their own. Let's dispel any such musings. On January 24, 2006, Canada's Governor General bestowed Natynczyk with a Meritorious Service Cross. This decoration—which recognizes “individuals for their outstanding professionalism and for bringing honour to the Canadian Forces”—is awarded to those “whose specific achievements have brought honour to the Canadian Forces and to Canada.”<sup>5</sup>

What “specific achievements” in Natynczyk's warfighting career warranted his receiving this “cross”? The Governor General's statement said Natynczyk was being recognized

“for his outstanding leadership and professionalism while deployed as Deputy Commanding General of the Multi-National Corps during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

From January 2004 to January 2005, Major General Natynczyk led the Corps' 10 separate brigades, consisting of more than 35,000 soldiers stationed throughout the Iraq Theater of Operations. He also oversaw planning and execution of all Corps level combat support and combat service support operations.

His pivotal role in the development of numerous plans and operations resulted in a tremendous contribution by the Multi-National Corps to Operation Iraqi Freedom, and has brought great credit to the Canadian Forces and to Canada.”<sup>6</sup>

### Resolving the Contradictions

How can Canadians reconcile Natynczyk's incontrovertible role in Iraq, with the mythic fantasy that Canada never even joined the Iraq war?

Natynczyk tried to explain this contradiction between public perception and reality during an interview in Iraq with *Esprit de Corps* magazine's Scott Taylor. When asked “how Canada could oppose the war yet deploy a senior officer,” Natynczyk responded:

“The Canadian government approved my deployment, so from my perspective there was no controversy. The instructions to me were clear: ‘move out’—and as a soldier I complied...

I take orders from the Canadian

government. The Canadian government sent me to Fort Hood, bottom line, to show in a tangible way the close affiliation between the U.S. and Canada.

I answer to the [Canadian] deputy chief of defence staff and through him to the chief of defence staff.... In this environment [i.e., in Iraq], I'm under the operational control of the III Corps commander."

So, while asserting: "I take orders from the Canadian government," Natynczyk said unequivocally "I'm under the operational control of the [U.S. Army's] III Corps commander." This illustrates the degree to which any perceived conflict over Iraq between the Canadian and U.S. governments and their militaries, is mere political posturing.

The Canadian government told Natynczyk to take his marching orders from the U.S. military. Then, while under their "operational" control, Canada's General Natynczyk commanded 35,000 American troops in Iraq.

As Natynczyk said, the Canadian government was using him in Iraq "to show in a tangible way the close affiliation between the U.S. and Canada." This, as he explained, was the "bottom line." This indicates another "bottom line," that there is no real ideological contradiction between Canadian and American policies in Iraq. They are as interchangeable as Natynczyk.

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Gov. General Michaëlle Jean, gave Gen. Natynczyk a medal for his "pivotal role" in the Iraq War



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**Source:** Governor General announces awarding of Meritorious Service Decorations, Office of the Governor General January 24, 2006.



**Gen. (ret.) Gordon O'Connor  
MP, Carleton-Mississippi Mills, ON**

On February 8, 2005, retired General Gordon O'Connor (who became the new Conservative government's first Minister of National Defence, 2006-2007), spoke out against the Liberal government's hypocrisy on Canada's role in the Iraq war: "The Prime Minister said that his government refused to send Canadian troops to Iraq two years ago and that decision stands. This, of course, is not in concert with the facts. Canada had and has troops serving in Iraq. Is the government embarrassed by their presence? Is that why it says one thing and does another?... The Canadian Forces had and have members serving with allies in Iraq. *Some of these members are operating at the highest level of command.*" (Emphasis added.)

**Source:** Hansard, House of Commons, February 8, 2005.