

The Fundamentalist Nonsense of "Canadian Values"



By Richard Sanders, coordinator, Coalition to Oppose the Arms Trade and editor, *Press for Conversion!*

Just as Prime Minister Jean Chretien had done (in October 2003), Prime Minister Stephen Harper made a surprise, "morale-boosting" visit to Afghanistan (in March, 2006). After narrowly winning Canada's January elections, Harper was soon off on his first foreign trip. The destination? Afghanistan! While there, Hamid Karzai became the first foreign head of state to shake Harper's newly-elected hand.

As U.S. helicopter gunships circled noisily overhead, the two smiling leaders exchanged political pleasantries. Karzai, whose election owed much to Canada's diplomatic, military, logistical and financial support, dutifully expressed thanks to Canada for giving: "the lives of your sons, for contributing in money, for contributing in soldiers and for being one of the biggest helpers in Afghanistan."¹

During his photo-op laden journey to rally public support for the Liberal-initiated war in Afghanistan, Harper-like Chretien before him—was filmed speaking to Canadian soldiers. He thanked them for "defending Canada's national interests," for "demonstrating an international leadership role for our country," for building democracy, promoting women's rights and protecting Canada from the "threat of terror [and] the threat of drugs."

Using the kind of Cold War rhetoric we expect from U.S. presidents, Harper said our war in Afghanistan was "vital...to the free world." Saying Canadians don't "cut and run," Harper served Canada's warfighters with a medley of folksy, sports idioms, talking of "stepping up to the plate" and saying "you can't lead from the bleachers."

And, according to Harper, "carping from the sidelines" is also a no-no. It's just not part of that great "Canadian tradition" of talking loudly about peace while quietly profiting from wars. Apparently though the reduction of complex political, economic and geostrategic issues into simple, black-and-white idiomatic expressions is as Canadian as a good old hockey fight.

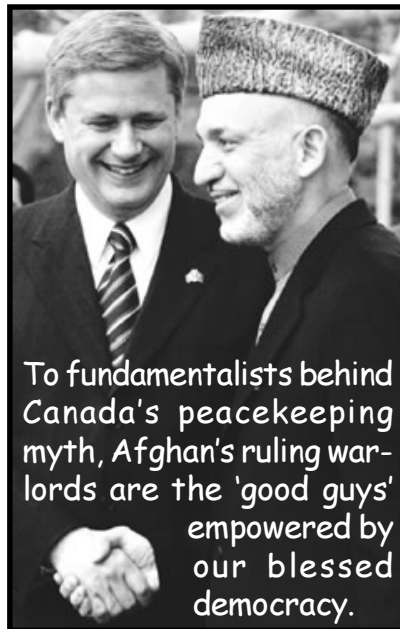
CP photo: Tom Hanson



Prime Minister Stephen Harper gives the thumbs-up to media from a U.S. "Blackhawk" attack helicopter after visiting Canada's military base in Kandahar. March 13, 2006.

Source: CTV. www.ctv.ca/generic/WebSpecials/canadian_forces/gallery5/image15.html

Indeed, the spouting of child-like truths is a near-glorious pastime in which our great, political leaders so often excel. Unfortunately, exposing their myth-making talk cannot be challenged in polite company, such as the media companies that regularly parrot our politicians' utter nonsense. To people



like Chretien, Martin and Harper, the ardently-held, but sadly-naive, belief in "Canadian values" amounts to a kind of sacred doctrine. It is, in effect, a religious fundamentalism; the expression of an all-too-literal take on the widely-accepted, official PR line that Canada is a global force for peace. (Ironically, our support for "world peace" is more-and-more being proudly recognized as a function of our military prowess.)

Those keepers of the political faith, like Harper—or, at least, his

speechwriters—seem to have a natural propensity for simplicity in both speech and thought. They can easily gush praise upon Canadian troops for "taking a stand" to promote democracy abroad or for carrying on that other apparently great national tradition, which Harper, while in Afghanistan, called "doing good when good is required."²

In a similarly-simplistic vein, Lt.-Col. Tom Doucet, Canada's "team commander" in the Afghan war zone, summed it up for docile media like this:

"Once we get rid of the bad people, we can carry on with full force...the reconstruction and development."³

However, neither Doucet nor Harper—or, for that matter, the Liberal "do gooders" who set the whole stage for this horror-ever wonder how Afghan's will ever get "rid of the bad people" who now run their government. To the fundamentalists behind Canada's peacekeeping myth, these Islamic terrorists and drug barons are the "good people" who our blessed democracy has empowered to rule Afghanistan.

References:

1. "PM rules out parliamentary vote on Afghan mission," March 14, 2006. www.cbc.ca/story/world/national/2006/03/14/harper_afghanistan_060314.html
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3. "Canada committed to Afghan mission, Harper tells troops," March 13, 2006. www.cbc.ca/story/world/national/2006/03/13/harper_afghanistan060313.html