

Notes for a Presentation by Paul Heinbecker *

Canadian Journalists for Free Expression

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Check Against Delivery

I) Introduction

I am honoured to be your guest and happy to contribute in a small way to the extraordinary work Canadian Journalists for Free Expression does.

And, I suspect like you, I am humbled to be in the company of your award winners, people of such courage and principle.

I am acutely aware of how privileged I am to live in Canada, where the worst penalty for speaking truth to power is censure,

A country where “words will never hurt me”.

Unless they are in an RCMP report shared with the FBI or CIA!

I am acutely aware that whatever I say tonight will seem trivial, and, in fact, will be trivial, compared to the contributions your award winners have made to press freedom.

I will spare you most of the bromides on the importance of a free press—you live that importance every day.

But I do have some points to make and some questions to ask that trouble me and I hope will concern you, as well.

I thought I wouldn't have to tell this audience that we live in a terribly divided and exceptionally risky world—but then I remembered how few Canadian correspondents abroad there are!

Canada has been able to shelter from the storm building internationally but we are vulnerable to events outside, even if most of us are largely oblivious to the risks.

We live in an age that is forcing us to make foreign policy choices that define us, especially

- on the US and Iraq**
- in Afghanistan**
- about The Middle East**

Those decisions have consequences that do shape our reputation in the world.

And that can impact our public peace at home.

After a couple of generations of globalization and with the advent of the 24 hour news cycle and the internet, foreign affairs are no longer so foreign

and, therefore, foreign policy is no longer such a political freebie, a cost free sop to anyone's political base.

This has implications for all of us--journalists, citizens, governments—

We could all use a wake-up call.

We need savvier governance by our elected leaders.

We need better coverage of the world by Canadian news media.

And we need more engagement in international affairs by Canadians, generally.

II) The Absence of Consensus

With the end of the Cold War, international consensus about security began to recede.

A remarkable solidarity returned briefly in the global response to 9/11.

But, with the advent of the Iraq war, launched illegally over the objections of most of the international community, division returned and distrust deepened.

Consensus on international security issues evaporated.

To be sure, security is not the same thing in Kandahar or Madrid, or in Nyala or Netanya, or in New York, London or Toronto.

Or Carthagenia or Cairo, where your two award winners work.

And maintaining some perspective is necessary.

For example, in contemplating the threat of terrorism to us, it is worth reminding ourselves that:

- Natural disasters killed nearly 240,000 people in 2004, the vast majority in poorer countries.**
- Small arms and light weapons killed at least 300,000 people last year, predominantly in the poorer countries.**
- Intra-state conflict caused several hundred thousand more deaths, notably in Africa.**
- Pregnancy-related complications killed more than 500,000 women, 99% of them in the Third World.**
- Malaria killed one million people last year, mostly in the poorest countries, and**
- HIV-AIDS killed almost three million people last year, again overwhelmingly in the Third World**

So, in these circumstances it is not surprising that people in the poorer countries regard terrorism, especially terrorism plaguing rich countries, as a second order concern for themselves, at best.

For most of the poorer countries, the main issue economic development.

A glance at the defence and development budgets of any developed country, let alone the most powerful country, is enough to know that the richer countries see the world very differently.

And this, despite the fact, that a dollar spent on humanitarian assistance arguably buys more security at the margin than a dollar spent on defence, at least judging by the response of Indonesians to American assistance during the Tsunami.

War on Terror or War on Islam

Nevertheless, the Zeitgeist of this age for us is terrorism, even if its costs are a small fraction of the costs of the other evils afflicting humanity.

So, tonight, I want to focus particularly on the mega-question, terrorism, with its two competing meta-narratives,

(I have been expanding my vocabulary since I became a professor!)

And on the crucial issues they raise for Canadian governments, for Canadian journalists and for Canadian citizens generally.

The western narrative holds that Wahabis/Salafists/Jihadis/Al Qaeda have embarked on a war to defeat the West.

They are the Islamo-fascists, who hate democracy, cannot abide freedom and resent success.

They are bent on creating a new Caliphate, a repressive theocracy, and subjecting the entire world to their fanatical rule.

The US as the greatest democracy is the greatest obstacle to their mission.

The threat of Islamo-fascism is just as menacing as the threat from Nazism and Soviet Communism.

Its adherents are fanatics who will stop at nothing.

Iraq and Afghanistan are battlefields in a much broader war, which now includes every continent except Antarctica.

It is naïve to believe anyone can stand aside--the struggle will progressively and inevitably draw us all in.

This long war with Islamo-Fascism will only end with the defeat of one side or the other.

The only way out is winning or losing.

The extremist Islamist narrative is the reverse, and no less delusional.

In this view, the “Zionist-Crusaders alliance and their collaborators” more generally, “under the cover of the iniquitous United Nations”, have embarked on a latter day crusade.

The United States as the lead crusader has been putting heavy military pressure on Islam and its believers, notably

- **Its presence in Saudi Arabia during and after the first Gulf war, “the latest and the greatest aggression since the death of the Prophet”**
- **Its wars on Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia,**
- **Its steadfast support for the Israeli occupation of Arab lands**
- **Its green light to Israel to deal with Hamas and Hezbollah,**
- **Its double standards on Iran and Israel on nuclear weapons and indeed on its own nuclear programs**
- **Its hundreds of military bases abroad that serve to prop up corrupt, apostate secular Arab governments**

Nor is the United States considered to be the only aggressor against Islam

- **NATO, including Canada, is killing Muslims in Afghanistan**
- **Russia is waging war on Muslims in Chechnya**
- **Europe has for years been marginalizing its Muslim population, many of whom are second or third generation citizens.**
- **The EU is stonewalling Muslim Turkey's aspirations to join the union, notwithstanding the fact that there has not been a single terrorist incident involving Turks in Europe.**
- **The Pope, other Western religious leaders' and even cartoonists are gratuitously attacking Islam and defaming the Prophet.**

Further, from Coca-Cola to Microsoft to the i-pod to bikinis, or less, on the Mediterranean beaches, the culture of the West is omnipresent, overwhelming and corrupting.

In these circumstances, according to the extremist Islamist narrative, it is the duty of every Moslem to defend the faith, with Islam's strictures against violence set aside in the interests of achieving the greater goal of self-defence.

“[Killing] the Americans and their allies -- civilians and military -- is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it.”

In the bloody struggle against the infidels, Islam will prevail.

These narratives have plenty in common, not least their paranoid quality.

They are believed by very powerful people on both sides.

I derived the western narrative from statements by President Bush and Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania, the third ranking Republican in the US Senate.

Much of the extremist Islamist narrative comes directly from the *fatwas* of Osama bin Laden

(Not the Turkish part; Bin Laden loathes the Turks for Ataturk's modernizations early last century, but many Muslims are watching the EU's games-playing on Turkey's aspirations.

But perhaps the most important point of these narratives is that each ends with a lot of innocent people dying.

Fortunately, the great majority of people in the world, including the great majority of Muslims, do not see themselves in either narrative.

The clash of civilizations is not preordained by a malevolent Providence or programmed into people's DNA.

We don't have to play any mindless role, if we—governments, journalists, citizens--only rouse ourselves from our complacency and our inertia.

And if we conduct an independent, made in Canada foreign policy.

IV) Domestic Peace

Foreign policy can have domestic reverberations.

There has long been an unwritten compact between Canada and new Canadians.

Immigrants have been welcome to move to Canada provided that they leave their old country conflicts behind them.

And by and large that compact has been honoured.

Part of the reason, the largest part, that it has worked is because Canada has genuinely welcomed immigration and encouraged its migrants to become citizens and to integrate.

Another part of the reason it has worked is because Canada has not, with the notable exceptions of two world wars, where it had little choice, made itself a party to those old country conflicts.

Nor have we signed up to Washington's ambitions to remake the Middle East, at least we had not.

We decided against participation in the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, with its specious *casus belli*, that killed scores of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of people, mostly Muslims.

And yet, there are still plenty of Canadians, including some serving in government, who continue to believe that it was a mistake for Canada not to line up with our traditional allies and fight.

And many who regard "the war on terror" as a real war, with all its legal consequences, not a metaphor.

...many who believe that if we do not fight them over there, we or our children will have to fight them over here, to paraphrase former Canadian NATO commander General David Fraser

And many who seem untroubled by the US's suspension of *Habeas Corpus* for foreigners under the just passed Military Commissions Act, and the US government's unilateral reinterpretation of the Geneva Conventions and the Convention against Torture, apparently the lesser of evils.

In Afghanistan, innocent Muslim civilians are once again dying as collateral damage in the fight against the Taliban.

In Lebanon, there are estimates as high as 1,300 deaths this past summer, the great majority of whom were Muslim civilians, including many children,

in incidents that Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have labeled violations of international law.

Julie O'Neill wrote that troubling story for the Ottawa Citizen but, insofar as I am aware, no other Canadian journalist did.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch also reported that Hezbollah was guilty of violations of international law.

The deaths of a Canadian Muslim family of 7 passed without adequate comment by the Canadian government and the loss of a Canadian peace-keeper drew a rebuke to the UN for being present in a war zone.

Meanwhile, Ottawa did not press for an end to the hostilities until Washington shifted its position, although Ottawa did call for a ceasefire more or less the moment that fighting re-ignited in Sri Lanka.

Consider for a moment what life might look like these days to Canada's Muslim minority.

After 9/11, racial profiling--official and otherwise—has become a fact of life.

The most egregious example was obviously the case of Maher Arar, who was sold down the river to the U.S who in turn, sent him to Syria to be tortured.

A citizen about whom Judge O'Connor has subsequently found that “there is no evidence to indicate that Mr. Arar has committed any offence or that his activities constitute a threat to the security of Canada.

In my judgment, the media did a pretty good job of keeping the Arar affair in the news through the long months he was in detention.

But I was disappointed at the apparent credulousness with which the media accepted the multiple national security exemptions in the judicial inquiry process.

In any case, seen from the perspective of Muslims, what have the consequences been?

Pursuant to the findings of the Commission, there has been

- No apology from the U.S government—just a so-far confidential letter from Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice**

apparently saying that the US would live up to its obligations under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, obligations that it has ignored frequently in the past, previous reassurances notwithstanding.

- **(By the way, finding out what that letter says, and more important finding out why the US sent Mr. Arar to Damascus and not to Ottawa and why the US has not apologized are worthy subjects of investigation that I hope some of you present here tonight are pursuing.)**
- **An apology from the Parliament of Canada, but none yet from the Government of Canada, perhaps because of a civil suit.**
- **The promotion of some of the RCMP officers involved—at least they haven't been given medals!**
- **An evidently heart-felt apology from the RCMP commissioner whose force, nevertheless, refused to cooperate in the Foreign Affairs effort to end Arar's incarceration in Syria, even though it knew it had sent highly damaging misinformation to the Americans.**
- **The Commissioner remains secure in his job despite claims that the then Foreign Minister, the then Solicitor General,**

the then head of CSIS and the current head of CSIS were all kept in the dark about the error.

Some Canadian Muslims fear flying because they may find themselves on the wrong list at the wrong airport at the wrong time and, as a minimum, be subject to harassment or, in the worst case, disappear Arar-like into some gulag of prisons.

Under the U.S. Military Commissions Act, they, like any Canadian citizen on US soil, can be “disappeared”, a term we used to associate with Argentinean generals.

Nor am I satisfied with the media’s scrutiny of the Security Certificate process under which several people are held in custody indefinitely,

pursuant to legal proceedings in which the defendant is kept largely in the dark and unable to challenge the evidence on which he is detained.

Whenever I hear national security reasons invoked for semi-secret trials, I am inclined, figuratively, to reach for my gun.

Perhaps it is just me, , but why do I know so much more about Guantanamo and what happens there, and about CIA prisons abroad and the practice of rendition, than I know about Canada’s Security Certificate process.

Or perhaps it is because the Canadian press has not sufficiently dug into the issue.

Through it all, many Canadian Muslims remain outwardly silent on the injustices they see for fear of attracting attention to themselves and being singled out for further injustice, or worse.

Nor is the Muslim community the only one that has reason to be afraid when domestic tensions rise.

B'nai Brith reports that 829 anti-Semitic incidents took place last year, the second-highest number in the twenty-three year history it has conducted its Audit.

Those incidents comprised harassment, vandalism and violence, including bomb threats to synagogues in Montreal and Toronto

Since 2001, the number of reported anti-Semitic incidents has increased almost three-fold.

Canada's diversity is our greatest strength and will remain so, so long as our constituent communities do not feel that they are being discriminated against, or threatened.

And that their government's foreign policy is sensitive to their preoccupations.

This is not a trivial point.

An IPSOS-MORI poll taken after the London subway bombing found that 53 percent of British Muslims believed that the war in Iraq [was] the main reason why London was bombed.

Although obviously no direct lessons can be drawn for Canada from that poll, it is a reminder that public peace is not a birthright, not even in multicultural Canada.

I am not arguing for pacifism.

Sometimes doing the right thing entails risks and dangers that must be run.

What I am arguing for is circumspection and perspicacity, and acting only in the full knowledge of the likely consequences of doing so.

It is crucially important that politicians refrain from playing politics on subjects of deep concern to our diasporas and minorities, especially from making electoral wedge issues out of international conflicts.

It is at least equally important that if they do so, the media have the courage to call them on it, hard.

An informed public is crucial to good governance.

Of course, it helps Canadians in their understanding of foreign affairs if they are getting their news coverage from professionally competent Canadians.

I recognize that Canadian foreign policy is necessarily left to governments and diplomats.

But Canadian correspondents do serve an important public interest in providing a picture that is otherwise drawn by American correspondents or other foreigners, who inevitably reflect the values and interests, even the policies and politics of others.

The fact that reporting is available in English or French from foreign broadcasting enterprises does not obviate the need or minimize the benefits of reporting by Canadians, aware of our own domestic realities and considerations, to Canadians.

With a few honourable exceptions, in Iraq the American media proved to be credulous “cheerleaders” embedded not only into the US army but willy nilly also into the White House propaganda effort.

During the Iraq war, I often heard Americans give thanks for the independent coverage by CBC Newsworld, which was available on C-SPAN.

And during the Lebanese-Israeli war this summer, I found Canadian coverage by and large professional, insightful and responsive to Canadian values and interests.

That's why it is such a pity that the number of Canadian correspondents abroad seems to be shrinking.

I understand that few newspapers anywhere are enjoying robust growth and that the financial health of some is precarious.

And I am aware of the sometimes detrimental impact of the internet on bottom-lines.

But I also know that the media in other smaller countries remain present abroad, if only because their audiences do not speak English, or French.

And I just wish more Canadian media outfits did the same.

International events are impacting the lives of Canadians to an extent not seen in many years.

The Prime Minister has acknowledged his surprise at the extent to which events abroad have intruded into his formerly five priorities.

I myself have found an extraordinary interest on the part of Canadians in explanations of the significance of foreign developments.

It is possible that a Canadian election will turn on foreign policy, for the first time since 1988 or 1963.

Perhaps the bean counters advising our media moguls to trim foreign operations are missing something important.

I certainly think so.

Conclusion

To summarize, to an extent not seen for years, foreign policy seems to be becoming a major factor in Canadian electoral politics.

Canadians, especially our diaspora and minority communities, appear to have a considerable appetite for information on what is happening abroad, which Canadian journalists are best able to satisfy.

The intensity of this interest, in part stimulated by globalization and the 24 hour news-cycle, means that foreign policy decisions are no longer “freebies” in domestic politics.

These decisions have consequences that can impact our public peace.

It is unwise and potentially dangerous for our political parties to play politics among our various diasporas and minority communities.

When they do Canadian journalists should not let it pass, silently.

Because Canadians need Canadian Journalists for Free Expression, who rightly support their colleagues abroad in reporting uncomfortable, even dangerous stories, not to shrink from reporting uncomfortable and dangerous stories in peaceable Canada.

Thank you

