

Empire's Ally, Canada and the War in Afghanistan

Edited by Jerome Klassen and Greg Albo

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A Book Review by

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Framing Afghanistan and Canadian foreign policy as being in a state of crisis, Jerome Klassen and Greg Albo's anthology *Empire's Ally: Canada and the War in Afghanistan* (2013) comprehensively interrogates the intersections between the war in Afghanistan and changes in Canadian foreign policy. Now two years since publication, Canada's military has withdrawn from Afghanistan, only to be redeployed (aircraft only as in Libya) to Iraq in the fight against ISIS as a continuation of what Adam Hanieh identifies as the "single war" in the Middle East. What is more, as I write this review, the parliament of Canada is voting to expand the Canadian mission against ISIS into the borders of Syria. A landmark move, this is but one example of the renewing evidence to ground the kind of "ally to empire" that the authors of this anthology argue Canada to be.

Split into four sections, this book takes its readers through a radical critique of how the very mechanisms of Canada's "good will" nation building in the "failed state" of Afghanistan is creating the very conditions of turmoil it is meant to solve. Addressing those already familiar with the claim that global capitalism functions as an empire, this anthology offers little new theorizing of empire, but uses it as a base to investigate how Canada operates on the world stage. The collection holds tremendous value to researchers, students, Canadian citizens, and the public at large who are concerned about the relationship that capitalist interests have with military deployment.

The first section is a historical account of how Afghanistan became a focal point of capitalist imperialism. It depicts the historical development of Afghanistan and the arguments western powers have used to intervene in the region as a whole. Of note is Adam Hanieh's argument that Afghanistan and Iraq constitute a "single war", which, while bifurcated in Canadian political discourse, was enabled by the strategies behind Canada's military deployment. Structurally crucial for the anthology is Klassen's own addition. Here he links NATO's alliance with war lords, the neoliberalization of natural resource management under NATO's Bonn Process strategy for state development to the resurgence of the Taliban; identifying the means for state construction as the instigation of state failure.

Developing the book's general myth busting theme, part two delivers poignant critiques of the political economics of Canada's foreign policy. Paul Kellogg's historical analysis of the

Canadian military since the mothballing of the Avro Arrow, presents a sobering reflection of our cold war peacekeeper status as a form of military parasitism. He traces the transition out of our peacekeeping status to the decline of America's dominate position in the world and the securitization of Canada's growing stake in developing economies. Todd Gordon's critique of "middle power" and "dependency" theories blind spots extends this investigation into Canada's growing economic investment and extraction from third world nations. The analytical force of this is to identify Canada's independent interest in increased global military interventionism.

Part three brings the previously distinct foci on Afghanistan and on Canadian foreign policy together delivering a resounding destabilization of the political communication of Canada's motivation to be there. Angela Joya begins this section, identifying how the military focus of Canada's "whole of government" approach to nation building is structurally preventing Afghanistan from developing its own central authority to enforce law. Most forceful is Anthony Fenton and Jon Elmer's unveiling of the propaganda of diplomatic intervention, with a focus on Canada's Strategic Advisory Team-Afghanistan's (SAT-A) intimate role in helping to shape national policy in Afghanistan. They depict how, despite having "civilized" Canadian personal in key advisory positions, many patriarchal laws, some which grant tacit approval to marital rape, have been introduced in the country because of NATO's alliance with the northern warlords. Even when Canada was asked to comment on these policies, no argument was made. These actions are not in accordance with the progressive humanitarian narrative sold in Canada about helping women. Indeed, it undermines the emptiness of this signifier as Canada's motivation to be in the country.

All of the authors in this anthology are radical in their critiques, as they focus on the root social relations and institutions behind this crisis of capitalist imperial war. The structure of the last section, *The Antiwar Movement*, however, is split into two chapters focusing on the anti-war movements, first in Quebec and then in Anglo Canada, parallels the nation's founding myth of uniting two separate nations. Derrick O'Keefe's concluding chapter even begins with an account of the anti-war movement in the UK uncritically developing an analysis based off of Canada's past Empire connections. The most reflexive insight in this section was the correlation Benoit Renaud and Jessica Squires identified between the deployment of the French-speaking Royal 22nd Regiment to Kandahar in 2007 and the steep rise of Islamophobia in Quebec during the public debate on "reasonable accommodation" between 2006 and 2008.

While only a few of the authors in this collection have been referenced in this review, together they all contribute a coherent challenge to the disciplinary frameworks traditionally used to study Canadian geopolitics. They address the deficiencies in prevailing theories with a largely critical material historic account. Even though Canada has left Afghanistan, the theoretical path paved by the book is ever more relevant today. Canada is still militaristically involved in the "single war" against terrorism, and the nation's other foreign policy elements have been progressively enfolded into streamlined neoliberal tools as suggested by the incorporation of the department responsible for international development into the state's department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development Canada.

About the Reviewer

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