

Has Michael Ignatieff changed his mind on Canada's Afghan mission, too?

If Michael Ignatieff were any other Canadian intellectual who very publicly changed his mind on America's war in Iraq now saying he thinks it was wrong for the U.S. to invade, there likely wouldn't be near the firestorm of debate over his mea culpa.

Since he has switched ideological horses mid-stream, Canadians need to know whether he has changed his mind on Canada's two most-pressing foreign policy issues: Canada's mission in Afghanistan and the Responsibility to Protect.

It is important to know that because the former Cambridge, Oxford and Harvard professor and widely-published author is now the deputy leader of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Having been to northern Iraq in 1992 and seeing Saddam Hussein's destruction of Kurds' and Shia Muslims' marsh lands, habitat and 5,000-year-old way of life, Ignatieff publicly supported the United States 2003 invasion of Iraq.

But, that was three years before he entered Canadian federal politics aspiring to be the Liberal leader.

On the weekend, *The New York Times* published a two-page reversal of Ignatieff's position on Iraq and his reasons for it in its glossy Sunday magazine.

He wrote that emotion was behind his initial support for it, not the harsh light of cross-examination and argument which he has apparently discovered as a politician.

He wrote that he failed to ask whether Iraq's Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites could hold together in peace what Hussein held together by terror.

With Hussein's ethnic cleansing of nearly 200,000 Kurds in northern Iraq in 1988 – often using gas, the killing of up to 5,000 Kurd civilians in Halabja also in 1988, the 1990 invasion of Kuwait and the campaign against Kurds and Sunni Muslims in 1992, there are those who still think that the world is better off without Saddam Hussein.

But, agree with Ignatieff or not, all least elite American and some Canadian readers know what Ignatieff now thinks about the wisdom of America's 2003 invasion.

The problem with Ignatieff's sudden change of heart is that it raises troubling questions among those who have read his works for years and thought that he had coherent foreign policy principles and positions.

Long before 9/11, in his 1998-book *The Warrior's Honour*, Ignatieff – who had been to Afghanistan – questioned how the Taliban's Islamic Jihad could be squared with human rights, women's rights and how the laws of war could be taught to people who had never heard of the Geneva Conventions.

He had witnessed first-hand thousands upon thousands of Albanian refugees fleeing ethnic cleansing in Kosovo in 1999 and in 2000 argued in *Virtual War* for the decisive use of military force against nation states which massacre its own citizens.

The ethnic cleansing was halted in 1999 when NATO warplanes – without United Nations Security Council resolution authorization – bombed Slobodan Milosevic's Serbian troops and para-militaries in Kosovo and Serbia for 78-days.

Ignatieff was later a member of the Canadian-sponsored International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty which published *The Responsibility to Protect* in 2001.

It argued that the international community has a moral imperative to intervene militarily to resolve humanitarian crises in failed and failing states such as the ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo.

It also argued that if the United Nations Security Council fails to act, then regional coalitions like NATO, ad hoc coalitions or individual states ought to in its absence.

Ignatieff's thinking in *Virtual War* is marbled like seams of gold through rock in *The Responsibility to Protect*, which has now been endorsed by the United Nations and is central to Canada's International Policy Statement put forward by the previous Liberal government in 2005.

Then, last year in May when Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government introduced a debate in the House of Commons to extend Canada's mission in Afghanistan to February 2009, Ignatieff was among just 24 Liberals who supported the mission.

In September, 2006, he repeated his support for the mission even as the bodies of five Canadian dead returned home from the battlefield saying Canadians had to keep "their moral promise to Afghans."

At the time, 32 Canadians had been killed. Today, at 66, that number is more than double and the 40,000 NATO troops in Afghanistan are anything but the overwhelming military force Ignatieff advocates.

One wonders, with his sudden change of heart, if Ignatieff is asking himself some of the hard questions

about Afghanistan that he thinks U.S. President George W. Bush should have asked about Iraq. In the end, Ignatieff has ignored his own past personal empathy for the Kurds in Iraq, so why should he worry about Afghans?

Are the Afghans next on his switch list, despite Canada's moral promise?

What about our responsibility to protect?

Americans know what you think, Mr. Ignatieff, Canadians are waiting.

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