



Canadian Friends
Service Committee
(QUAKERS)

Is it time for a Canadian military intervention in Iraq?

September 26, 2014

*“A good end cannot sanctify evil means; nor must we ever do evil, that good may come of it...
Let us then try what Love will do: for if men did once see we love them, we should soon find they
would not harm us. Force may subdue, but Love gains: and he that forgives first, wins the
laurel.”*

~ William Penn, 1693

As global citizens, Friends are deeply concerned by the incredible violence and human suffering in Iraq and Syria. We urgently seek a response from the international community which will end horrific acts of violence like those perpetrated by ISIS against segments of the Iraqi population (CFSC has spoken out with Canadian church partners [1]) or the beheadings of internationals [2].

A small majority (54%) of Canadians support a limited military advisory intervention in Iraq [3]. But is a violent response the only, or even the most effective, option which the international community has left, given the extreme and chilling realities of Syria and Iraq today?

Public discussion seems to centre around which forms of violent response will work best. But we need not feel that the only options are to support violent intervention or to stand back and do nothing. Through the roar of outraged and frightened voices which call for violence to subdue ISIS, there are those with opinions on how nonviolence can be part of a solution [4], [5].



Canadian forces in Kandahar, Afghanistan – CC-BY Master Corporal Yves Gemus

To many, the idea of a nonviolent response to such a brutal group as ISIS sounds laughable. But let's consider the evidence.

Modern wars have terrible human, environmental, and economic costs. But in addition, they have simply proven ineffective. They consistently fail to achieve their stated goals, including the goal of lasting stability [6]. In this case, prolonged foreign military interventions in Iraq, and NATO's support of violence in Syria, are direct causes of the current turmoil [7], [8]. Based on what recent evidence would we expect that a renewed military campaign will lead to a positive outcome in Syria or Iraq? We can also look to Libya [9] and Egypt to see that military campaigns, and control, have not led to stability or peace for those that matter – the people of these countries.



Syrian refugees in Kawrgosk refugee camp, Irbil, Northern Iraq, 2013 – IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation CC-BY

A great many studies have been produced in the past decade about how groups like al-Qaeda successfully recruit new members [10]. The findings may differ from what you've heard. Those who become terrorists are not poorly educated and do not display signs of major mental health problems. Almost all, however, have actual or perceived grievances based on violence that they

or a close relative or friend experienced and for which they seek revenge.

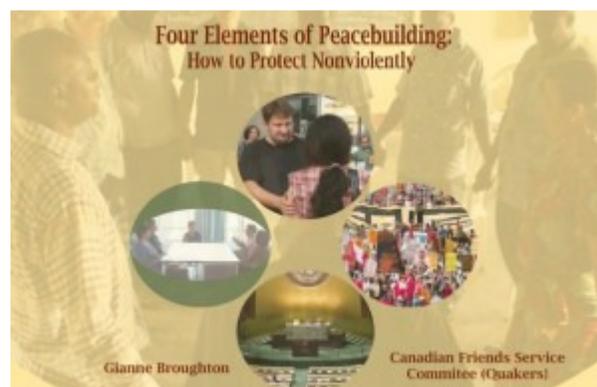
For every militant killed in the name of eradicating terrorism and making our world more secure, many non-combatant civilians are killed too, often with no consequence for those who killed them, nor reparations or reconciliation. This means that a great many family and friends develop grievances, and some may turn to violence. Therefore, far from reducing the numbers of militants, a violent response from nations like Canada may fuel recruitment. It has also been noted by social psychologists who've studied the recruitment process that, "Although exceptions exist, terrorists are usually males between 15 and 30 years of age — the same population most likely to commit violent crime in general, and the demographic group least likely to be deterred by the threat of physical force" [11].

Even if you do not believe, as Quakers do, that killing any human is inherently abhorrent as all have that of God in them, you should begin to see that a violent response is not likely to achieve the peace so dearly sought. A war on ISIS is not, and cannot be, a well-defined war against a well-defined enemy that can be subdued through violence – ISIS is not a state, is not a stable entity of actors, and is not limited to the boundaries of a country.

So far, Canada has committed to millions in humanitarian aid and, without parliamentary oversight, has sent 69 military advisers to Iraq to take part in a 30-day "non-combat mission" [12] (likely training the Iraqi military, which Human Rights Watch [13] has repeatedly documented committing gross human rights abuses). Not only is this mission expected to be extended, given the request for added support from the United States announced on September 24th, it is likely to expand [14].

Canada urgently needs to build its capacity for non-military interventions. Nonviolent strategies need to be funded and supported as fully as a military intervention would be if we want them to achieve their goals. When the world community does not pay attention to and support local nonviolent movements, we may encourage some people to give up on these attempts and embrace violent tactics instead, with the hope that they will be more effective [15].

For all of the attention placed on which military option will work best, did you know that there are hundreds of effective nonviolent techniques that can help to build peace? [16]



CFSC's book on peacebuilding theory and examples can be ordered in print form by contacting our office

To take just one example, as described in our book, [The Four Elements of Peacebuilding: How to Protect Nonviolently](#) [17], nonviolent protective accompaniment has proven effective in brutally violent situations all over the world. It works best when teamed with adequate support for both human rights and human needs (safe drinking water, housing, education, etc.).

Human security is dependent on functional infrastructure and systems to uphold human rights and meet human needs. At best war weakens these. Thus by its very nature, war is a tool which undermines long-term security [18], [19].

Knowing the unacceptable costs of war, Canada should support local groups working to uphold human rights and meet human needs. Canada can also work to prevent ISIS from selling oil internationally to finance its operations. And Canada can support the enforcement of agreements like the Arms Trade Treaty – which regulates the international trade in conventional arms – which it has so far declined to sign and ratify [20].

We encourage you to speak up – explain to those you know that Canada's options are not simply “send in the military or do nothing”. Our website has more information about how nonviolent techniques work to build peace. Visit: <http://quakerservice.ca/our-work/peace/>

Endnotes:

[1] [“Faith Leaders Statement on the situation in Mosul, Iraq”, August 1, 2014](#)

[2] [“ISIL Has Beheaded Journalist Steven Sotloff” by Shirley Li and Polly Mosendz, The Wire, Sep 2, 2014](#)

[3] [“Majority support Canadian troop deployment in Iraq, poll shows” by Marco Chown Oved, The Toronto Star, Sep 7, 2014](#)

[4] [“How Nonviolent Action Could Thwart ISIL's Advance in Iraq” by Maria J. Stephan, Defense One, June 27, 2014](#)

[5] [“Six Steps Short of War to Beat ISIS” by Phyllis Bennis, Common Dreams, Sep 11, 2014](#)

[6] This is one of the central points made in depth throughout the book “Preparing for Peace – by asking the experts to analyse war”, Westmorland General Meeting of Britain [Yearly Meeting](#), 2005. The full text of the book is available online at <http://www.preparingforpeace.org/book1.htm>

[7] See for example [“How America Made ISIS” by Tom Engelhardt, Tom Dispatch, Sep 2, 2014](#)

[8] [“Lessons Learned in the Bucca Camp” by Kathy Kelly, Telesur, Sep 16, 2014](#)

[9] [“Statement in opposition to the military intervention in Libya” by Canadian Friends Service Committee, April 15, 2011](#)

[10] [“How Social Science Can Reduce Terrorism” by Scott L. Plous and Philip G. Zimbardo, The Chronicle of Higher Education, Sep 10, 2004](#)

[11] *ibid.*

[12] [“Opposition calls for vote, debate over Iraq deployment” by Lee Berthiaume & David Pugliese, The Vancouver Sun, Sep 6, 2014](#)

[13] [“US Missing the Boat on Halting Iraq Arms Sales” by Erin Evers, Feb 26, 2014](#)

- [14] [“Stephen Harper considers U.S. request for further military help in ISIS fight” by Susana Mas, CBC News, Sep 24, 2014](#)
- [15] [“Behind the Iraqi crisis: the crushing of the nonviolent Sunni uprising” by Milan Rai, Peace News, Aug 2014](#)
- [16] [Global Nonviolent Action Database – a project of Swarthmore College](#)
- [17] [The Four Elements of Peacebuilding: How to Protect Nonviolently by Gianne Broughton, 2013](#)
- [18] [“Preparing for Peace – by asking the experts to analyse war”, Westmorland General Meeting of Britain Yearly Meeting, 2005](#)
- [19] “Achieving security in Sub-Saharan Africa: Cost effective alternatives to the military”, edited by Geoff Harris, p.6-7, Institute for Security Studies, 2004.
- [20] [“Ottawa approval bypassed in proposed Canadian arms exports to Iraq” by Kenneth Epps, Project Ploughshares, May 21, 2014](#)