

## On Loyalty – Part 2: Who? Whom?

In a **previous** item we criticised the idea that a true ally is one that exhibits loyalty. We said that the whole idea of loyalty in international affairs is a chimera – and also exculpates Weasels (and, we should add, the bad guys too) by shifting the focus away from moral issues towards merely formal ones.

After Steven Den Beste had expressed that idea (NB he may have **changed his mind** since), some of his readers queried his omission of Israel from his short list of true allies of the US (Britain, Australia and Canada). And he **explained his conclusion** – again in terms of loyalty:

In all three cases of Canada, the UK and especially Australia, their willingness to stand by us in this crisis is more voluntary, more motivated by feelings of loyalty and friendship, than by the frank lack of choice which is Israel's top (but not only) reason for standing by us.

Yet **recent events** seem to cast doubt on that opinion of Canada. The Canadian government's "willingness to stand by us in this crisis" turned out to be **close to zero**. Perhaps even more telling, there was an upsurge of bitter anti-American feelings among Canadians – or at least, an upsurge in public expressions of hostility that already existed: events like **this one** in Montreal:

The sellout crowd of 21,000 at Bell Centre was asked to "show your support and respect for two great nations" before the singing of the American and Canadian national anthems.

But a significant portion of the crowd booed throughout "The Star-Spangled Banner" in an apparent display of their displeasure with the U.S.-led war against Iraq.

Defenders of Canada's honour will point out, quite rightly, that governments come and go, and that if the accidents of history had happened slightly differently, a Canadian Prime Minister might well be standing stalwartly with the US – and Israel – today. **This one** certainly would have. They will also rightly point out that there are plenty of idiotarians, and indeed plenty of anti-Americans, in the United States itself, where it has not been difficult recently to drum

up far larger crowds chanting far viler things than "boo".

This illustrates a further misconception in the idea of international 'loyalty'. For the real alliances are not between nations but between political traditions. Within each nation, there are many of these, struggling continuously for expression and domination of the souls of their respective nations and of the world. Governments represent factions, and the extent to which a particular government 'truly' represents the nation's values can only be determined later, with the hindsight of the victors. So governments – and public opinion too – sometimes take positions contrary to what will later be regarded as the fundamental moral values of that nation. An alliance between states can become **unreliable or completely worthless** if a faction whose heart isn't in it happens to be influential at the time. So if we want to gauge the extent to which there is a 'true alliance' between two nations, we have to take into account all the political traditions that have a reasonable chance of affecting the relevant policies of the governments of those nations. That includes not only political parties but also such things as the traditions of Common Law and the world-views of the US State Department, the British Foreign Office, media professionals and the 'Arab Street'.

Now, speaking of Israel, please cast your mind back to a time when it was Israelis, not Canadians, who were displeased with US policy: the moment of shame in 1981 when the US Government behaved spitefully towards Israel for **delaying Saddam Hussein's nuclear weapons programme**. The White House suspended deliveries of F-16 fighters and the State Department joined the frenzy of international condemnation of a morally impeccable action which, a decade later, **made the Coalition's job so much easier in the first Gulf War**.

So America's 'loyalty' to Israel faltered at that moment, but do you think that any crowds at Israeli sports stadiums booed the Star Spangled Banner or American athletes? It's unlikely, because Israeli national pride, unlike that which was on display in Montreal, contains no element of anti-Americanism. Consider also what would be happening at this moment if Israel had no need of allies. What if it were secure, universally recognised, and not under any threat or attack? Can anyone doubt that Israel would nevertheless, today, be a prominent member of the Coalition of the Willing? When someone is fighting righteously for their life, it is always easy to accuse them of acting out of 'mere' expediency. But that's a grossly unjust argument. *Of course* they are acting out of expediency, because to act expediently is, in that situation, also to act rightly. But Israel is, primarily, acting rightly, just as Britain was when it was fighting for its life in 1940, and as the nascent United States itself was in 1776.

Fundamentally, when Israel or Britain or Australia side with the United States (or when, as usually happens, Canada does too), and when the United States supports them, it is neither out of loyalty nor out of narrow expediency, nor should it be. It is out of agreement about what is right.

### Part 3

## Question

Did America ever issue some sort of apology to Israel about criticizing the bombing of the nuclear reactor?

by [Daniel Strimpel](#) on Mon, 04/07/2003 - 00:52 | [reply](#)

## Apology

I don't know if they apologized but they did honor the pilot, didn't they?

Bill Henderson

by a reader on Mon, 04/07/2003 - 12:20 | [reply](#)

## Canada?

Canada? Who's that?

by [Chris](#) on Mon, 04/07/2003 - 15:24 | [reply](#)