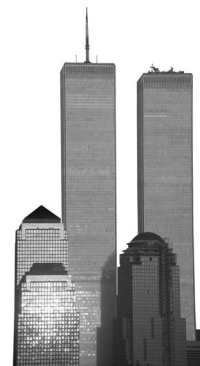


DESMOND MORTON: TERRORIST CELLS CAN BE GOT RID OF



One of Canada's best-known historians, Desmond Morton currently teaches at McGill University, where he served for six years as the first Director of the McGill Institute for Canadian Studies. He is the author of over 30 books on Canadian political, military and industrial relations history. His A Short History of Canada and A Military History of Canada have both been published in multiple editions. Professor Morton served from 1954-64 in the Canadian Army, has taught at the University of Ottawa and the University of Toronto, and was president of Erindale College from 1986 to 1994. William Watson spoke with him on Oct. 5.

Historien canadien de renom, Desmond Morton enseigne à l'Université McGill où il a été pendant six ans le premier directeur du McGill Institute for Canadian Studies. Il a publié plus de 30 ouvrages sur l'histoire politique, militaire et industrielle du Canada, dont A Short History of Canada et A Military History of Canada, maintes fois réédités. Après avoir fait carrière dans l'armée canadienne de 1954 à 1964, Desmond Morton a été professeur aux universités d'Ottawa et de Toronto et, de 1986 à 1994, président du Erindale College. William Watson s'est entretenu avec lui le 5 octobre.

William Watson: Desmond Morton, you're a military historian and an historian of Canada. What was your first reaction to the events of Sept. 11th?

Desmond Morton: I was going up in the elevator in the Leacock building at McGill and a colleague rushed in, caught the door, pushed in and said: "They've bombed the World Trade Center." And I said "Oh! didn't they do that before?" And I had no idea of the extent or of the nature of the damage, or the nature of the attack. It was a busy day and I didn't really find out much about it until the evening.

It seemed to me a remarkable success, but like most military operations, it hadn't gone totally well, for those who tried it. The Pentagon was hit on the side that least mattered. And one plane had gone in the woods. So this was a pretty good operation, about half-

right. And that's how I viewed it. I felt strangely detached from the state of panic and emotional explosion which was all around me. My wife phoned. "Did you know that Reed Scowen's daughter worked in the World Trade Center?" She had gotten out, and I said, "Well that's good." I didn't know the father particularly, and I didn't know the girl at all. So I found myself upsettingly calm and uninvolved in it, to a degree which puzzled my family but seemed to me about the way I react to most things to do with death.

It seemed to me also that a terrorist event was going to happen somewhere, and the full significance of the American innocence of all these things did not really come to me for a couple of days. But obviously, historically, that's a major significance of this event. This is the country that felt itself—and

historically was right in feeling—more immune, even than Canada, from international events.

William Watson: Do you think that will be the governing theme of the investigation that's bound to take place? After Pearl Harbor, there was an elaborate investigation and blame was laid.

Desmond Morton: I'm sure the feeling of complacency and public sense of immunity will *not* be blamed. Individuals will be condemned for failing to do things. But, as with Pearl Harbor, people didn't really believe that it was possible. I mean, the notion that the man with a ragged-looking beard and a strange organization that didn't even speak English could actually pull this off would have prevented anyone taking even warnings of it very seriously. I'd spent the summer writing about Canadian defence and the great



Desmond Morton

difficulty of making Canadians take defence seriously, partly because we don't even have a Pearl Harbor in our memories. Americans had a Pearl Harbor, but it was somewhere way off in the Pacific. They also had Oklahoma City, but that was their own internal insanity. So immunity is a very significant feature of the problem whose salience has become more apparent to me over the ensuing days and weeks.

William Watson: I guess it would be natural for an historian to look for precedents. Do you see any precedents in a war against terrorism that would either encourage you or discourage you?

Desmond Morton: The whole concept of a war against terrorism strikes me as odd, because the al-Qaeda organization was surely responsible for bombing two embassies and an apartment building in Saudi Arabia and the semi-torpedoing of the *USS Cole* in Aden. Why does the war start on Sept. 11th? I'd assume that the U.S. was after this organization long before that. The use of the word "war" struck me as purely emotional and more than slightly misleading. War is a state-to-state event. So far we have treated individuals, or groups, as criminals. And criminal sanctions are rather more powerful. If you catch a prisoner in a war, you can't execute him. Americans would clearly treat somebody involved in the World Trade Center attacks as they treated Timothy McVeigh. If not worse.

William Watson: I assume what explains the reaction is the scale of the damage this time, and the fact that it was on U.S. soil. And the shock of it. Before Sept. 11 the U.S. was not free to pursue the war, or the campaign at least, in the ways that their military and CIA may have wanted to do. Simply because public opinion wouldn't go along, but now it will.

Desmond Morton: Public opinion is very important, but using words in an illegitimate sense has consequences. And I'm not sure the public dictated the language, or the rhetoric of response. They may considerably influence the response, and in fact I think most people outside the most excited Americans are rather pleased that President Bush, this Texan-trained president, has in fact thought first and shot later. He hasn't even shot without making a case. [Editor's note: This conversation took place two days before the American and British bombing of Afghanistan started.] And that's comforting because most people would have anticipated that instant reactions would have aggravated a number of problems, including the American difficulty in pursuing and achieving a stable alliance against this kind of activity.

William Watson: You would expect some form of military action in response?

Desmond Morton: I think it will come, but I'm prepared to think it might take quite a while. Locating the villains, or the surviving villains, isn't altogether easy. In fact, they may have people in custody—we don't know a great deal about the progress of the investigation except what Mr. Blair chose to put on his website—but they've been working very hard at it, and they don't start from totally stony ground. They know a certain amount about this organization, its leadership and its structure. But they will also know, from even the Gulf War experience, that these are people with considerable propaganda skills as well as operational planning ability, and wherever they do any damage, the Americans can be certain that non-

combatants, women and children especially, will be assembled and used. Indeed, they will be presented as almost the sole victims. There will be in the world, indeed there are people in Montreal today, who are eager for that counter-offensive to begin. And they will cheer it to the echo.

William Watson: A campaign against terrorism is likely one that you can't lose, in the sense that your civilization isn't going to end. There is not going to be an invasion of North America and we aren't going to be conquered. But is it also a campaign that you can't win?

Desmond Morton: It may be a campaign that you can't win in a very clear, decisive way. A Hollywood scenario in which all the villains are gathered together in a room, into which ... I mean that's pure nonsense. But terrorist cells can be gotten rid of. Can you remember one called Abu Nidal? It's pretty much faded from memory. Some of its veterans may well have gone on to al-Qaeda. We don't know. The Baader-Meinhof gang is now a memory from the seventies. The groups themselves fade. The IRA has gone through a number of manifestations until we're now down to the "Real IRA," which isn't really an army at all. According to General de Chastelain the number of people in this army of brigades and divisions and battalions is about 170. I don't know how many IRA members make up a battalion: perhaps three. But that's your whole purpose. As long as they stay hidden in the woods or the basements of Belfast they can be any number you want to mention.

But, yes, they can be isolated. They can be arrested, or killed, and they then cease to exist. However, other groups will pop up. The technology is very available to people. Anarchists used to be people who went around, as far as cartoonists were concerned, with black hats and black cloaks and a sizzling bomb, with the explosive power I suppose of a modern grenade. In other words, it could kill or seriously injure two or three people—

and that was serious if it were the president of France or the prime minister of Spain, as victims used to be—but not much more than that. Now we have, of course, the means, and the ingenuity, to achieve much greater blows. But I think the World Trade Center catastrophe, tragedy is a very big strike. I don't think it's easy to achieve that very often.

William Watson: What should Canada's role be in this? What should we be doing? There was a hint in something that you said earlier that if—I don't think you meant to imply this, but I inferred it—that if we keep our heads down, we may not be the targets. Does that mean we should keep our heads down?

Desmond Morton: I don't think we have that choice. All I was saying is that we have not been hit. Which is a fact. And it changes the way we look at the problem. People can distance themselves, they can put their heads down. Or they can say "It's all the Americans' fault," for policies that, on the whole, Canada has bought into.

We made a number of decisions, starting in 1940, when we were in great danger and we invited and got American guarantees for our security and defence. We were in great danger because, facing Hitler and Germany and Italy, we were actually the number two power on the Allied side of the World War. That was quite a frightening place for Canada to be. And the Americans, for reasons that suited their national interests as much or more than ours,

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pledged their support and provided substantial defences to Canada during the Second World War. And have since. We don't have much choice. We're either going to be in or we're going to be a very ill-treated outsider to American hemispheric defence.

That doesn't necessarily fill me with joy, because this isn't the kind of European relationship in which there are a number of significant powers who have to be conciliated and listened to. And the Americans aren't very good at listening to allies. They have enough trouble with their own decision-making in Washington to want a great many outsiders further complicating it. That's the reality of bilateral politics. That's why NATO was such a providential solution for Canada. It got the Americans into an alliance to which they had to pay some attention. That was illustrated when Jacques Chirac came to Washington and, among other things, persuaded the president to use more realistic rhetoric and to eliminate talk of crusading, which I am sure George Bush had done without any conscious sense that these were words that made Muslims feel very angry indeed. Most Americans wouldn't realize what the word "crusader" means in Islamic circles. And similarly with the word "war." So I think Canada needs that providential alliance as much as it needs the United States, but it certainly needs the United States. And I don't think we can afford to be outside the perimeter.

William Watson: On the question of the words that are used: in deference to Muslim sensibilities, "Infinite Justice" was dropped as the code name for the Afghanistan campaign. Has similar care been taken in the past in the choice of names for campaigns? If Hitler had been offended about the idea of "Overlord," we wouldn't really have worried about that very much.

Desmond Morton: We didn't use to pick operational code names with any political consequences at all. What you needed were two words that had different phonetic beginnings. You just picked them out of a code book. They

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could have been "Daisy Fresh," or whatever. If you look at the code names for major operations in the Second World War, until you get to Overlord, which seems to have had a certain—maybe accidental—attractive, mediated kind of significance, they really don't make any particular sense at all. And they're not intended to. There are not supposed to give any clues as to what's going to happen. But in recent times, they've become part of a mediatized society. They have to be words that will appeal to the press, and the media generally, to use for the operation.

William Watson: You have served on committees that have advised successive ministers of defence. I suspect there is going to be a larger budget for security, writ large. Say there were three billion dollars. What would be your advice about how to spend that?

Desmond Morton: People have asked me—not the minister of defence—what could Canada do? I keep saying: "Well, what do people want Canada to do?" One of the things Americans have been talking about in my presence is taking on more peace-keeping. Relieving the Americans from roles in Bosnia, Kosovo, the Golan Heights, which they don't like doing. If you read the October *Atlantic Monthly*, which comes conveniently on this particular theme, you'll see what damage maintaining a brigade in Kosovo, in Bosnia, does to battle-readiness in the Third Infantry Division. It should make people more impressed with what

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Canada does in peacekeeping. We've been doing this without any fuss at all, but it does have effects on the military. Well, if that's what the Americans want U.S. to do so they can do something else, we would want to consider it. And that could take up to as much as a billion dollars. We'd have to recruit more people. We'd have to expand our kit and equipment and so on. At the same time, it might be something that Canadians would find more congenial than joining in an army land war somewhere in the Middle or Far East.

We certainly need some of the updates that have been called for so that our naval and our air equipment can be used for surveillance. The navy and air force have a need for an unmanned drone plane, a pilotless aircraft that can do surveillance of the coast. They're quite expensive. We've been talking about doing them. There are now some models on the market. That's the kind of thing that we will have to spend on. And if your total were three billion dollars, you could easily spend a billion of it on that. The Sea Kings will be an embarrassment for our otherwise excellent frigates.

I think more personnel will be needed in all sorts of circumstances. And so numbers probably should be restored to something like 70,000 as opposed to 60,000. We can do that using reserves, but when you bring them into active service the reserves now cost, per head, not very much less than the regulars.

William Watson: How about security at borders and intelligence and so on?

Desmond Morton: Whether they are part of the Customs or the Immigration service, the Mounted Police, the Montreal Urban Community police or whatever, security people are pretty expensive. Soldiers are poorly paid by comparison, but their problem is not so much the individual wage as the fact that it usually turns out to be the family wage. There are not many jobs for dependents in the areas where we keep our military forces so, if a master corporal is making \$44,000 a year, he may be well paid by the standards of his education, training and background, but that may be the whole income of his family. That wouldn't be true if they lived in Toronto, Montreal or Barrie. But they don't. They live in Cold Lake or Petawawa or Bagotville. So the cost per uniformed soldier, or uniformed policeman, is not small.

William Watson: I'm interested in how the society will be changed by this. You've studied both world wars. What happens on the home front, which of course is actually *the* front in this kind of campaign. What would you expect to happen?

Desmond Morton: One of the things that's alarmed me is the easy response by the public to visibly different neighbors—not necessarily because of skin color, but because they're wearing *hijabs* or different clothes. I happened to spend the summer, for another reason, looking at how we behaved at the outset of the First World War, and I know about the Second. When the war broke out in 1914, and again in 1939, and even in 1941, the government official line was: "Look, we're not fighting the Germans, we're fighting the Kaiser or Hitler. The ruler and the militarists have hijacked this wonderful civilization which we admire. Don't blame Germans for it, blame the Kaiser." Not unlike certain phrases that have come from the Prime Minister of Canada and the President of the United States and so on. The same in the Second World War. There wasn't initially any official concern for the Japanese-Canadians: I've reminded people, God

knows it's true, that the army, the navy, even the RCMP, felt there was no danger from Japanese Canadians in British Columbia. The navy felt you should pull out their fishing boats—but it definitely looked as if once that was done, that was all.

The air force was somewhat different, for two reasons. One is that the air force commander out west was himself a British Columbian and fully imbued in the values of that province's white population. Secondly, the air force stations, which were very few in B.C., tended to be located on the relatively few flat areas, and those were also occupied by Japanese market gardeners. So you could understand why an air force base worried because it was surrounded by Japanese farmers.

But what really happened is that as Japan was succeeding in the war—not only taking Hong Kong with its 2,000 Canadians, but just rolling along with nothing to stop it—people panicked. In the First World War, at the outset, people were quite nice about the Germans on the whole (although Montrealers were not). But when the Germans kept winning, and when in 1915 they sank the *Lusitania*, then people burst forth and demanded internment. In both wars, public opinion drove the government to respond the way it did and evacuate the Japanese. At that point, the army was saying "Look, we haven't got enough people to defend the coastline *and* protect Japanese-Canadians. We can't do both. And we can't protect them from their neighbors, so you'd better remove them."

I tell this long story to anticipate the fact that we've had one traumatic terrorist event. And people have responded, I think, with shock and horror, but also with a sense of stiff upper lip, realizing that, no, it wasn't ordinary Arabs or Muslims or anybody else that did this—not even Hindus as some idiots in Hamilton thought. Apart from that bit of lunacy, people have behaved in a fairly sensible and steady way. What happens though after the next and the next? That's what I would worry about. It's when the terrorist con-

tinues to succeed and somehow, all this police activity hasn't found all the cells (though I don't think we're actually going to see Mr. bin Laden for quite a while, unless he makes a serious mistake). So the endurance and stiff upper lip and common sense of the population, you have to depend on all this, but Canadian historical experience is not entirely reassuring.

William Watson: You'd hope that we were better now, but there is no real reason to suppose that.

Desmond Morton: No. The post-war answer was always to blame the government. I remember writing a textbook for British Columbia, in which the instructions were very clear to make plenty of references to the Japanese internment, how dreadful it was and so on. And so I did. And

devoted some attention to British Columbia's public opinion, the newspapers, *The Sun*, *The Province*, all the other papers, politicians, opinion leaders denouncing Ottawa for failing to act, and screaming and howling. When I mentioned all this, British Columbia's education authorities thought this was highly inappropriate. "Who did it?" they said, "It was Ottawa?" So it became a blame-Ottawa thing, and it lost most of its instructional value.

William Watson: For the time being at least, there may not be big changes in how we live?

Desmond Morton: I think the border will become a political issue. There will be slowdowns. The transportation and export industries have been busy berating Ottawa for allowing this to

happen, though I'm not quite sure what our powers are. After all, when you cross the border, you pass right by Canadian Customs and Immigration and stop at the American side. And the same is true on the other side. At the moment they're looking into cars on the American side to see if they're not exporting some al-Qaeda terrorists, but normally you don't stop on the side you're leaving, you stop on the side you're coming into. Entry controls are what matters at borders, and I don't think exit controls can work very well. It will be harder to get across the border, and take a little longer to get into an airplane. And, as I told my Armenian son-in-law, you better shave when you go into New York.

William Watson: Thanks very much for doing this.

First reactions

It is not enough to act against Afghanistan. With globalisation, there is a global threat. Any state which collapses into chaos could become a terrorist haven; there is now a small-scale version in Kosovo. If any such state has a basic industrial infrastructure, terrorists could use it to make chemical or biological weapons. Early mapmakers devised fanciful descriptions of their terra incognita, but we cannot afford to imitate them. "Here there be anthropophagi" may be harmless; "here there be terrorists" is not. We must assist, and if necessary coerce, any state which is afflicted with enclaves of anarchy or terrorism until they are eradicated.

Bruce ANDERSON, *The Spectator*, Sept. 15

Determined men who have transposed their own lives to a martyr's afterlife can still inflict an amount of destruction that defies belief. War is conducted with a fury that requires abstraction—that turns a plane of peaceful passengers, children included, into a missile the faceless enemy deserves. The other side has the abstractions; we have only the

mundane duties of survivors—to pick up the pieces, to bury the dead, to take more precautions, to go on living.

John UPDIKE, *The New Yorker*, Sept. 24

I don't wish to argue the rights and wrongs of American foreign policy, but how do we find it incredible that other people might not have noticed the planes in the sky or the corpses in the street? No fewer than 62 million civilians died in the twentieth century's wars (as opposed to 43 million military personnel), buried in mud or sand or broken stones in all seasons and every quarter of the globe—in London and Paris as well as in Sarajevo and Baghdad. Why not New York and Washington?

Lewis LAPHAM, *Harper's*, Nov. 2001

It is impossible to fully comprehend the evil that would have conjured up such a cowardly and depraved assault upon thousands of innocent people. There can be no cause or grievance that could ever justify such unspeakable violence.

Jean CHRÉTIEN, Sept. 11

We Canadians love to exaggerate our differences from Americans and brag about our moral and cultural superiority.

But now we can think only of what we have in common—our beliefs about human decency and the rule of law. The differences don't matter any more, if they ever did.

Yesterday the American President made a declaration of war, and we supported him with all our hearts.

Few Canadians of my generation could ever have imagined that such a day would ever come. After all, we're the ones who picketed the U.S. consulate. We're the ones who made George Bush jokes. But this war is just and necessary, and not to fight it is unthinkable.

For the first time in my life, I comprehend something of what my American mother and father felt the day Pearl Harbor was bombed. We do stand for something after all, and now that it's at risk, we know exactly what it is. There is an evil that must be stopped. There's no debating it. You can debate the ways and means, but not the moral imperative of the thing.

Margaret WENTE, *Globe and Mail*, Sept. 13