

Canada, the next Iraq?

Quite a storm in an empty scud shell has been brewing between the US and Canada. Forget war in Iraq – the real conflict is north of the 49th parallel. Worried about invasion? Or who's next on the American deck of cards of easy political targets? Don't.

Move over Syria. The real strong arm tactics are being applied by the US to its northern neighbour. While US pressure has seemingly worked its magic with Bashir al-Assad, and left him apparently quaking in his boots, Canada is defiant to its last moose.

So annoyed with Canada is the glorious leader of the free world for the stance that this plucky little country took, that he recently cancelled his one-day trip to Ottawa to visit the Canadian prime minister. George W Bush was too busy.

But not too busy to be hooking up at his Texan ranch with Australia's Prime Minister John Howard, a strong supporter of the coalition, in early May. These are antler raising tactics. (Even a Canadian can tell this was a SNUB).

What has provoked this outrage? During the war Canada decided to chart its own course. It felt that the US should go through the United Nations before deciding on going to war.

UN consultation was imperative as far as Canada was concerned and it would only join the clumsily named coalition of the willing if a resolution was passed.

This has split the country, with one part happy to back the prime minister and the other half horrified that at a time of crisis Canada would not support what is essentially a family member.

Some see Liberal leader Jean Chretien's position as a principled approach to multilateralism, others think of it in a slightly more cynical light. There is certainly no love lost between: the two lead-

On the AGENDA



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ers. It's the old story of lying next to the elephant.

Now, however, there is an added element of visceral loathing. Comments from the American ambassador to Canada, Paul Cellucci, rebuking the Liberals for not supporting the US in Iraq have fuelled a political storm.

Disappointed and hurt by Canada's decision, Cellucci has complained about its foreign policy and said this pesky country doesn't even spend enough on defence. So high is the passion running that some Liberal MPs have talked about expelling the ambassador.

Basically what he meant is that it's payback time. So what's really happening behind the scenes? Is it because of Canada's position? Or because it exported Celine Dion? Could it be something more sinister? Could it be oil? Indeed. Just not in Iraq.

Out west in the Alberta tar sands lies what are reputed to be reserves that rival Saudi Arabia's. While the world watched fascinated as events unfolded in the Middle East was the US slowly integrating, with the furtiveness of a stealth bomber, Canada into its fold, making it the 51st state.

What has been most intriguing about the war is the abundance of conspiracy theories. A lot of unanswered questions remain unanswered. Such as where is Saddam Hussein?

My favourite explanation and a possibility, though Saddam is probably hiding in Baghdad, is that the mafia have smuggled him out, given him cosmetic surgery so that he could start a new life abroad. Well Canada is abroad, and a mafia hub, and its plastic surgery is second to none.

Do the weapons of mass destruction really exist? Have they, along with Saddam Hussein, been smuggled out only to be found hidden in the Canadian wilderness? Think about this: Sars, severe acute respiratory syndrome, hasn't hit the US but is rife in Canada.

Americans, paranoid about the deadly disease, have cancelled in droves conventions and any trip north of the border crippling the economy. Even the WHO, earlier this week, told people to call off non-essential travel to Toronto, the worst hit area outside of Asia. You may ask: what is essential, travel to Toronto?

Is this simply coincidence or the precursor to invasion or chemical warfare? Is Donald Rumsfeld really Darth Vader? Or simply Canadian?