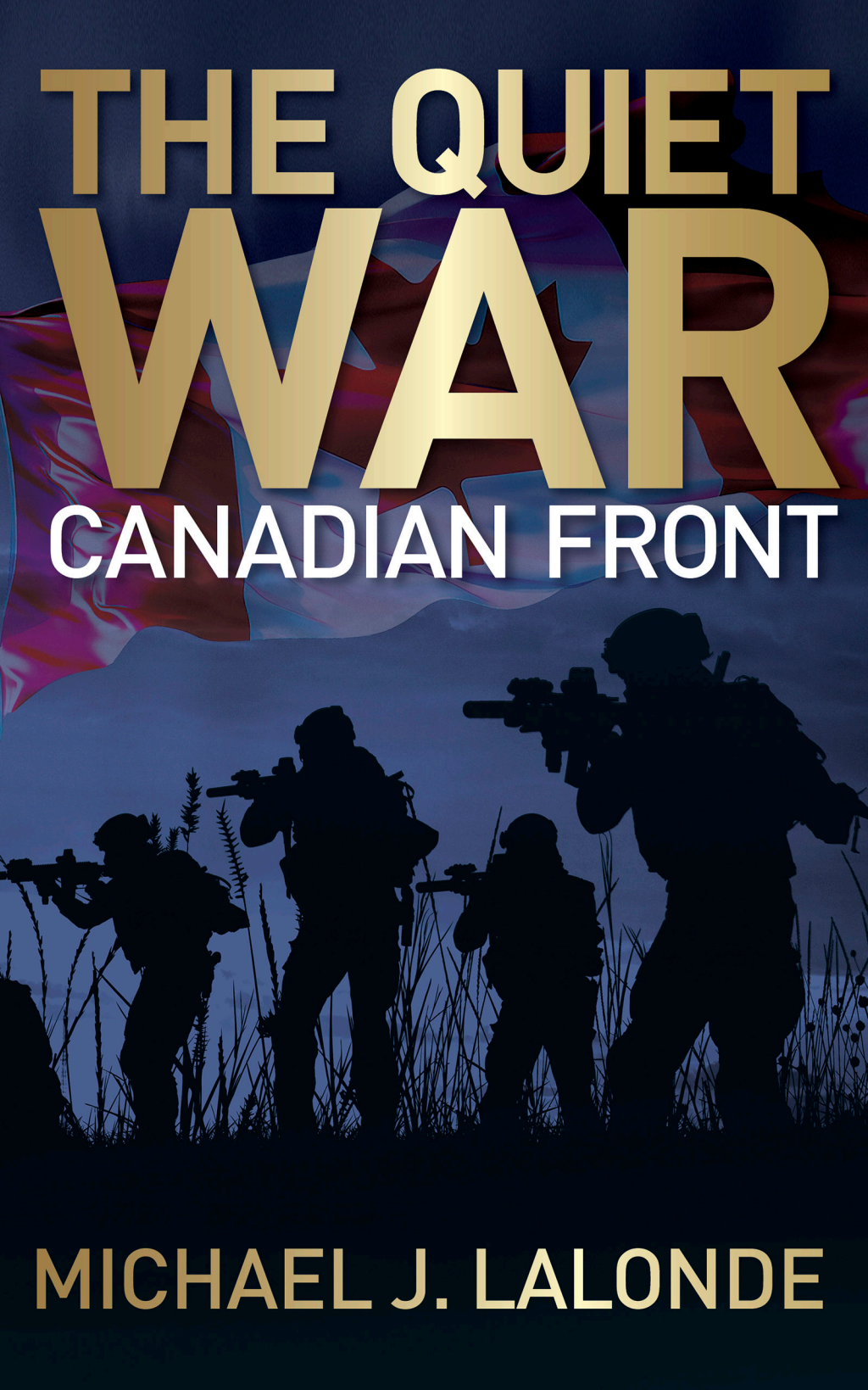


THE QUIET WAR



CANADIAN FRONT



MICHAEL J. LALONDE

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THE QUIET WAR BOOK 1

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PROLOGUE

AL-NAJM AL-SAGHIR'S HEADQUARTERS
MOROCCO, UNKNOWN LOCATION
MONDAY, JUNE 3
1500 LOCAL TIME

Control was an illusion. Al-Najm Al-Saghir had long accepted this. Yet, in surrendering to that truth, he had learned to shape illusion into something more enduring. Every deception was an instrument, every detail a blade honed to a singular purpose. Nowhere was that philosophy more evident than where he now stood. Concealed behind jagged mountain rocks, the entrance was invisible unless one knew exactly where to look. Inside, the stone chamber felt ancient and untouched by time, the air cool and heavy with oppressive silence. At its centre stood a large steel table, surrounded by metallic chairs. Al-Najm stood motionless, his dark eyes fixed calmly on the space soon to be occupied by his co-conspirators. Patience, after all, was a virtue he possessed in abundance.

Malik, one of Al-Najm's top lieutenants, waited nearby, shifting his weight restlessly as his fingers tapped silently against his thigh. Tall and broad-shouldered, with close-cropped blond hair and a jagged scar running along his jaw, he had the posture of a man accustomed to action, never truly at rest.

"Do you think they will go for it?"

Al-Najm did not answer. He let the silence settle, heavy as the stone

around them. When he finally spoke, his voice was quiet, almost dispassionate.

"They will."

Malik hesitated. "How can you be so sure?"

Al-Najm's gaze didn't shift. "Because they have failed. Repeatedly. They are men who imagine themselves architects, yet build nothing. They will understand soon enough."

Malik nodded slowly.

Al-Najm watched him from the corner of his eye. Malik was a rare breed. He carried the quiet menace of a true believer, unwavering in purpose, yet he was more than a fanatic. He was competent, something most ideologues weren't. More importantly, he could grasp the shape of the larger design once it was revealed to him, which earned him a place at Al-Najm's side in this warren where every shadow seemed to watch.

The walls held their silence like a secret passed down through centuries. There were no cameras, no screens. Nothing electronic that could betray the conversation about to take place. Though it was unlikely any signal could pierce this depth of the mountain, Al-Najm had ensured the walls were embedded with Faraday shielding. Even if one of his visitors foolishly brought an electronic device, no signals would escape this room. As a final precaution, he had positioned his elite guards along the edges of the chamber, partially hidden by the shadows. He scanned the room, noting their presence. Everything was in place.

This gathering, 20 years in the making, was the culmination of meticulous planning, manipulation, misinformation, alliance building, and a series of attacks across the globe that had left governments and economies in disarray without a trace of who was responsible. Unless Al-Najm wanted someone to take the fall or gain from his actions.

He combined strength and reason, and forged himself into a weapon that could strike, but could never be struck back. He worked hard to build a legitimate and productive life in the heart of Western society. Those who knew him as Al-Najm Al-Saghir didn't know his real name, and those who knew him by his real name had no reason to suspect that he had risen to become one of the most powerful masterminds of subversion, manipulation, and violence in the world.

The few aware of Al-Najm's existence considered him a terrorist.

They couldn't have been more wrong. Mere terrorism was sloppy, ineffectual, and outdated. Besides, most practitioners of terrorism used such practices to effect political change. A child's tactic for a child's goal. What he had in mind was far more ambitious. All the acts of barbarism that terrorists were known for had a role to play. But absent a grand strategy to make them matter, such attacks accomplished little besides galvanizing a military response.

Long-term, these tactics could erode Western nations' resolve to wage war, but as far as Al-Najm was concerned, if it reached that point, he'd already lost. He cared little about who controlled Afghanistan, Iraq, or Syria. Nothing short of the destruction of the Western way of life would suffice. Influencing politics mattered not.

He was intent on reshaping entire societies.

His co-conspirators began to arrive and took their places around the table. When Al-Najm took his seat, a subtle tension filled the room. He always hid his face behind a dark keffiyeh, leaving only his calculating eyes exposed, though even those were hidden behind contact lenses that disguised their natural colour.

Assembled before him were senior generals from Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela, along with a few corporate magnates. Al-Najm scanned the room. Each of them was used to shaping events that altered nations. Though their backgrounds and cultures were vastly different, they all shared two things in common: a desire to rid the globe of American influence and bitter impatience with the lack of progress on their respective national priorities. This made them vulnerable, which Al-Najm had leveraged with subtlety. Their presence wasn't sanctioned by their respective governments. Simply by gathering here, they had handed Al-Najm a weapon against them; exposure would bring dire consequences back home, making his grip on them all the stronger.

Al-Najm remained silent. He listened patiently to the discussion unfolding around him. It started cordially enough. Each of the generals vented their frustrations with American hegemony, but that was where their unity ended.

Ali Khorasani, commander of Iran's Quds Force, leaned forward, his neatly trimmed beard, flecked lightly with grey, framing a mouth drawn into a bitter scowl. "The Quds Force has disrupted American operations from Baghdad to Beirut. We have paid in blood and

sacrifice while the rest of you debate and posture. When will the rest of you finally act yourselves?"

General Ivan Pavlovich Reznikov, head of the GRU, straightened in his chair, the cold intensity of his pale blue eyes fixed squarely on Khorasani. "You speak of sacrifice and bloodshed as if Iranian soldiers were dying by the thousands," he said with barely concealed contempt. "Your Quds Force hides behind terrorists and proxies. Annoyances, nothing more." He waved his right hand dismissively. "If Iran's military dared to take direct action as we have in Ukraine, perhaps you might achieve more than headlines and petty sabotage."

General Wei Zhou of the People's Liberation Army turned slowly toward Reznikov. The lean Chinese officer adjusted his posture with minimal movement, radiating quiet disdain. "And what has your bold invasion achieved, General Reznikov? Your armies were driven from Kyiv by a vastly smaller nation. You have become trapped in a war of attrition. You have inflicted nowhere near enough damage to distract the Americans sufficiently. Until you manage that, China cannot move decisively on Taiwan."

Jin-Seong Park, of North Korea's Reconnaissance General Bureau, was about to speak until Al-Najm raised his hand.

A heavy silence blanketed the room. When Al-Najm finally spoke, his voice was deliberate, his manufactured Arabic accent thick yet refined. "Your frustrations are understandable. None of your nations has achieved any measure of success. That is why you are here," he said, leaving the implication to stand on its own. They needed him, and they knew it. "Thus far, your efforts have lacked unity of purpose. That changes now."

Al-Najm let his words linger. He watched the men absorb the gravity of their failures and the pact that lay before them. Their eyes, full of suspicion, were now fixed on him. They knew only fragments of what Al-Najm had built: a global network that controlled some of the world's most powerful mercenaries, terror groups, and transnational criminal organizations, but his true power came from his mastery of information warfare. Al-Najm had turned entire populations against their governments, using propaganda to twist narratives and sow discord. He manipulated the media, planted false stories, and fuelled anger across Western societies, though he couldn't take sole credit. The "new media," as he referred to it, had unwittingly helped a great deal.

His influence had infiltrated universities, social movements, and protests. He weaponized the disillusionment of the West's youth. The irony of the situation was not lost on him. They were so quick to embrace Al-Najm's invisible hand, encouraging them to silence their opponents, that they could not see how they, too, would be silenced in the end.

Reznikov was the first to break the silence. "Let's get on with it. The Americans are weak and have a lame duck president. We should devise a plan to attack quickly."

The men around the table nodded in agreement.

"We attack them by not attacking them," Al-Najm said.

He stood from his chair and paced around the room, the eyes of the gathering following his every movement.

"Strike them directly, and you give the Americans a reason to unite. After the Soviet Union fell, the Americans turned inward. Divisions over race reignited. There were riots, domestic terrorism, cults, and armed militias. But 9/11 provided them a rallying point, and they fought back. They need a villain. Without one, they are once again devouring themselves."

Al-Najm stopped for a moment, focusing his gaze on the men around the table. "You would all rush to be that villain, but America's villains have a way of becoming its saviour."

He shook his head. "There shall be no saviours for the Americans this time."

Al-Najm's voice dropped, taking on a sharper edge. "We start with Canada."

"Canada?" Khorasani scoffed. "Why bother with Canada?"

"You underestimate the power of an easy victory." Al-Najm's tone was calm, almost mocking.

He resumed his pacing. "Canada is divided politically and culturally. Separatism is a persistent undercurrent in Quebec and the Prairies. Their western region feels abandoned. This kind of discontent festers, and unlike the Americans, they are unlikely to unite against anything except the United States," he added with a tang of irony.

"He has a point," Reznikov said. "Their military is weak, their internal security is scattered, and their government is consumed with social justice and identity politics. Canada is vulnerable in ways other NATO countries are not."

"Precisely," Al-Najm said. His gaze zeroed in on Zhou, knowing his next point would resonate with the general. "It's government is obsessed with style over substance, more concerned with appearances than actions. And large swaths of their public now question their own history. They suffer from an incurable national identity crisis. This makes them blind to real threats."

Zhou nodded silently, then glanced at Park, who returned the nod.

Al-Najm allowed himself a faint smile under his keffiyeh. "My lieutenants have already planted seeds among Canada's youth, turning many of them against their government, particularly over Israel. They don't realize they are aligning with my network, but they will serve our purpose."

He sat back in his chair, his voice taking on a hint of menace. "If we destroy Canada, the Americans will be forced to focus their attention on North America. It will hit close to home, but won't have the same effect as attacking them directly. They will waste time searching for an enemy they cannot find. That will give each of you the opening you need to advance your nations' agendas."

Al-Najm spent the next two hours detailing his plan and assigning tasks to everyone in the room, patiently addressing their questions along the way.

"Impressive," Reznikov said. "The only problem I foresee is time. It will be difficult for any of us to bring our resources to bear so quickly without causing suspicion. We are all being watched by Western intelligence and our own internal security."

Park leaned forward, his round face brightening with a playful grin beneath slicked-back hair. A devoted student of Western culture, he'd opted for an expensive, open-collared shirt under a casual designer blazer.

"I like your plan. I do. You can count on North Korea to unwittingly do its part," he said. "But I have to side with Comrade Reznikov." He smiled and winked at the Russian. "Your timeline is like trying to hit a fastball with a chopstick. It can't be done."

General Zhou let out a slow, deliberate exhale as he closed his eyes, pressing fingertips firmly against his forehead in quiet embarrassment over his junior partner's comments. Recovered his composure a beat later, and looked at Al-Najm. "I can implement my part of the plan immediately, but I agree with the others. Your opening act comes too

soon.”

Al-Najm had anticipated this. He shared their assessment of the timeline. He had no intention of using their resources for his opening move, but he allowed them to express their thoughts, nevertheless. These men needed to feel like they were in control, and illusions were his specialty.

Over the next few minutes, each man around the table shared similar sentiments.

Alexander Volk, one of the corporate magnates, exchanged a nod with Al-Najm. Volk’s bearing was relaxed and casual, standing out starkly among the military generals. The youngest at the table, in his mid-thirties, Volk had an angular face framed by thin, stylish glasses. His dark, wavy hair accentuated his youthful confidence.

“I can assist with that,” Volk said.

Reznikov’s eyes flicked dismissively toward Volk’s designer suit and polished appearance. “You sell your services to the West as readily as you do to any of us. Trusting you with my operations is out of the question.”

“Indeed, I do, General. Which is why I can guarantee that the West will not discover our plans until it is too late. I designed their cybersecurity. I can influence what they know and don’t know. And my mercenaries can support the first tranche. The risk will be mine to take. If it doesn’t work, you simply walk away.”

Reznikov glanced at Al-Najm and nodded his approval.

“And what role will you be playing,” Khorasani said, pointing his finger at Al-Najm, “aside from giving us orders.”

Al-Najm crossed his arms across his chest. “I’ve taken steps to collapse Canada’s national health care system, destroying a key pillar of what national patriotism they have left. Their political leaders will be too busy pointing fingers and salvaging their own careers to see the larger plan.”

Khorasani leaned back in his chair and mulled it over. A moment later, he leaned forward, palms flat on the table. “Very well. I will play my part in this.

Seeing no further objections, Al-Najm clapped his hands together. “It is settled then. Preparations will begin at once. We do not stop at Canada, but it is where we begin. A small victory, but one that could fracture the Western alliance and create openings for us all.”

As the men around the table took their leave, Al-Najm felt a deep sense of satisfaction as he reflected on the inevitable outcome that would soon follow.

Canada will not fall. It will vanish. Quietly, completely. And no one will know who to blame.

READ THE REST OF THE STORY

I hope you enjoyed reading the series prologue. The first book in the series, *The Quiet War: Canadian Front*, launches on December 9, 2025. The ebook edition is available for preorder on Kobo and Amazon. Paperback and hardcover editions will also be available for preorder once the final formatting is complete.

Thank you for your support.

-MJL-

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Michael J. Lalonde is a former Canadian Armed Forces intelligence officer turned military thriller author. Drawing directly from his experience in military intelligence and national security, he brings uncompromising realism to his fiction, blending covert operations, battlefield tactics, and political intrigue. As the creator of *The Quiet War*, he launches a bold new series that puts Canada at the centre of a geopolitical conflict. His work offers a gritty, authentic look at what Canada's elite warriors can do when the stakes are highest. When he's not writing, he can be found scuba diving in the depths of the St. Lawrence River.