

Canada Preparing to Expand its Role in Mideast War

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Recent media reports confirm Canada's Conservative government is preparing to significantly expand the Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF's) role in the new US-led war in the Middle East.

According to a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) report, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government is "working feverishly to prepare for Canadian jets to strike targets inside Syria."

Apparently one reason for the haste is the dearth of "targets" in Iraq. An article published Thursday by the right-wing *National Post* complained that the half-dozen Canadian CF-18 fighter jets Ottawa has deployed to the Middle East "are spending most of their time on the ground."

When parliament voted at the beginning of October to approve Canada joining the US-led war coalition against ISIS, the government motion limited the CAF intervention to Iraq unless the Syrian government expressly requested that the coalition strike Syria as well.

The Harper government is now trying to create—in reality fabricate—a "legal" justification for expanding the CAF campaign to Syria, which in the absence of the Syrian government's approval would be a flagrant violation of Canadian, to say nothing of international, law.

Unlike the United States, which has long arrogated the "right" to violate state sovereignty and mount foreign military interventions at will, Canadian law still prohibits a Canadian military intervention in a sovereign state unless that state's government has requested assistance or the action has been sanctioned by the imperialist-dominated United Nations' Security Council.

Speaking to the CBC, Justice Minister Peter MacKay confirmed that the government is discussing broadening the CAF's mandate to encompass Syria and that lawyers in his department are working to eliminate legal barriers to such a step. "We're operating against an enemy that does not respect any borders," added MacKay.

Canada's government and media are talking about possible CAF action in Syria entirely from the standpoint of attacking ISIS positions and infrastructure. But such an expansion of the CAF's role in the Mideast war would also constitute a first step—legally, politically and militarily—to combat with Syria.

And not just because Syria's military might seek to stop the US and its allies from violating Syrian sovereignty.

From the outset, the new US-led war in the Middle East has been directed against the Syrian

government of Bashar Al-Assad, a close ally of Iran and Russia.

Since 2011, the US and its allies, including Canada, have been seeking to overthrow Syria's government. Toward that end, Washington and its regional clients, such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, have financed and armed an Islamist-led, anti-Assad insurgency. Indeed, ISIS's emergence as a major force in Syria and Iraq is the direct outcome of the US "regime-change" proxy war in Syria.

The Obama administration and Harper government have trumpeted ISIS's atrocities so as to overcome popular opposition in North America to a new US-led war in the Middle East. But in outlining the war's aims in early September, Obama reiterated that Washington is determined to drive Assad from power. Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other of the US's regional war coalition allies, for their part, make no secret that the war's primary purpose is regime change in Syria.

The Canadian government's discussions of expanding the CAF mission to include Syrian air strikes comes as the US is expanding its own military operations. No sooner were the US congressional elections over than the Pentagon announced that Obama has approved its sending another 1,500 US troops to Iraq, effectively doubling the size of the US force deployed there.

Even before this escalation, Canada's corporate press was full of commentary on the need for the Harper government to extend the current Mideast deployment beyond six months.

The CAF top brass have also repeatedly signaled their support for an extension of Canada's military mission. Speaking last weekend, the head of the CAF, General Tom Lawson, declared, "We are absolutely prepared to meet the government's needs should they decide to commit Canadian troops and Canadian aircraft for a longer period."

Lawson's reference to troops is especially significant, as Harper has tried to allay concerns about Canada being sucked into a prolonged neo-colonial war by pledging that there will be "no [Canadian] boots on the ground" in Iraq. In reality, the government has already authorized the deployment of 70 Special Forces Troops to northern Iraq to advise and train Kurdish Peshmerga militia.

In media interviews and an appearance before the House of Commons Defence Committee this week, Defence Minister Rob Nicholson refused comment on whether the CAF mission to the Middle East will be extended. But his colleague, Public Safety Minister Stephen Blaney, welcomed the news that a small number of former CAF personnel are preparing to join the Peshmerga fighters. In response to a CBC report that at least six Canadian veterans of the Afghan War have traveled or will soon travel to Iraq to support the Peshmerga, Blaney proclaimed that the Conservative government "would not oppose a citizen who is willing to engage in a battle for liberty and helping the victims of barbaric crimes."

The government's readiness to support veterans prepared to risk their lives to defend the interests of Canadian imperialism does not extend to offering them basic support when they return home. This week, the federal auditor-general issued a report that supported longstanding complaints of veterans and veterans' organizations that the government has failed to provide Afghan war veterans with the medical, financial and social assistance that they need.

“Overall, we found that Veterans Affairs Canada is not adequately facilitating timely access to mental health services,” declared the auditor general’s report. Over the past eight years, as the government has been stonewalling veterans seeking assistance, the Veteran Affairs Ministry returned to the federal Treasury more than C\$1.1 billion in unspent funds.

The number of CAF personnel who have committed suicide during the past decade (160) has now surpassed the number who were killed in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2011 (158).

The Harper government and the Canadian ruling elite are actively preparing for further aggression and wars, and not just in the Middle East.

Light on the type of discussions now underway in ruling class circles was shed by remarks made at last weekend’s Halifax International Security Forum (HISF), a conference on security and defence policy funded by the Canadian government and strongly supported by the US establishment, including such figures as US Republican senator John McCain.

In the presence of numerous prominent political and military figures from Europe and North America, including four Conservative cabinet ministers, HISF organizer Peter van Praagh declared the Western imperialist powers to be engaged in a struggle for “modernity” against ISIS, Russia and China.

“In their different ways,” declared van Praagh, “a rising China, a resurgent Russia and Islamic extremism in all its manifestations, are antithetical to the free and secure world that we, in this room, and beyond, are striving for.”

Van Praagh, a former top official with the US National Endowment for Democracy, went on to urge an aggressive, multi-front drive against China and Russia so as to shore up North American global hegemony—a policy whose logic is nuclear war. He specifically endorsed the Obama administration’s plans to isolate Russia and China economically and strategically. “Signing the Trans-Pacific Partnership, leaving out China, and the (US-European) Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, leaving out Russia, will,” said Praagh, “go a long way toward that end.”

The Harper government is actively participating in the US’s belligerent moves against Russia and China. Its alignment with the US “Pivot to Asia” has seen Ottawa sign a secret military agreement with Washington on operations in the Asian-Pacific region, and plans are being readied to establish advanced CAF bases in Singapore and South Korea.

Harper has been one of the most prominent supporters of the pro-Western Ukrainian government installed through last February’s fascist-spearheaded coup. Canada is also contributing to NATO’s provocative moves against Russia in eastern Europe and the Baltic by dispatching CF-18 fighters to patrol Russia’s borders.

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