

Canada's Harper Stokes Imperialism's Drive Against Russia

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Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper has been among the shrillest in the chorus of western leaders denouncing and threatening Russia.

He issued a series of inflammatory denunciations of Russian “aggression” during a European tour this past week that began with a trip to Ukraine. During his six hours in Kiev, Harper lauded the government installed by last month’s fascist-spearheaded, US-German organized coup and conferred with its leaders, who include a half-dozen ministers from the fascist Svoboda Party.

If Harper’s aides and the press are to be believed, Canada’s Conservative Prime Minister has led the campaign for the western powers to take provocative measures against Russia. These include the increased deployment of NATO forces on Russia’s borders, sanctions against Bank Rossiya, Russia’s exclusion from the G-8, and the threat of more punishing economic sanctions if Russia does not “completely reverse” its annexation of Crimea.

Both privately and in public, Harper has hectored European leaders to intensify the western drive to bully and isolate Russia, blithely stoking a conflict that could easily spin into a global military conflagration.

Speaking Thursday at a joint press conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Harper took issue with Merkel’s contention that the crisis over the Ukraine could soon be defused. Canada’s prime minister said he doubted Russia under President Vladimir Putin would ever be allowed to rejoin the G-8 and urged the western powers to prepare for a long confrontation with Russia.

“The reality we have to come to terms with,” claimed Harper, is that Putin has “not desired to be a partner.” He has created “a rivalry instead of a partnership.”

This is a lie. It is the US, Canada and their European allies that have moved aggressively against Russia, which emerged from the restoration of capitalism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union economically and geopolitically hobbled. In the past two decades, NATO—the US-led military bloc whose *raison d’être* was to counter and, if need be, militarily conquer the Soviet Union—has incorporated all of the states of Eastern Europe formerly allied with the USSR, as well as the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which were part of the USSR till 1991. As a result, NATO forces are now deployed on Russia’s borders.

Moreover, the detaching of Ukraine from Russia and its subjugation to western domination has long been a key objective of US geopolitical strategy.

To achieve this predatory objective, the US and Germany precipitated the current crisis by intervening in Ukraine and fomenting the fascist-led overthrow of the country's elected president, Viktor Yanukovich, after he balked at signing a pact with the European Union. That pact, since resurrected by the government born of the coup, both barred the Ukraine from entering into a customs union with Russia and subjected Ukraine to a brutal IMF restructuring program that would result in the shutdown of much of the country's industry.

Canada has been an important player in the western drive to geo-politically and economically annex Ukraine, a country rich in agricultural and other resources. Although total trade between the two countries is barely \$300 million per year, Canada has designated Ukraine one of twenty foreign policy priority countries. Like Washington, Ottawa has invested large sums since the 1990s to support pro-western "civil society" organizations and parties and played an active role in the 2004-5 Orange Revolution—the first concerted US-led drive to mount a regime change operation in Kyiv. In this, Canada has leveraged a network of right-wing Ukrainian-Canadian businessmen and Ukrainian-Canadian ethnic organizations, especially the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC), whose president, Paul Grod, accompanied Harper on his March 22 visit to Kyiv.

The UCC functioned as a virtual arm of the Canadian state during the Cold War. It includes organizations that openly celebrate the heroes of the Svoboda Party and other contemporary Ukrainian fascists—the World War II Ukrainian nationalist Nazi collaborators who carried out the mass slaughter of Jews and Poles. Some UCC constituents, such as "the Society of Veterans of Ukrainian Insurgent Army" and the "Brotherhood of Veterans 1st Division UNA," were themselves founded by participants in Stepan Bandera's Nazi-allied Ukrainian Insurgent Army.

While Harper respected diplomatic norms in disagreeing with Merkel, he publicly dressed down the head of Holland's largest employer lobby group last Monday when he raised fears that the escalating confrontation between Russia and the West could hurt Europe economically. Interrupting Bernard Wientjes, Harper declared, "None of us like seeing disruption to investment or to markets or to trade, but the fact of the matter is ... when you have something like a military occupation of a country by another country, this is not something that we can subordinate to economic interests."

Harper's claim that economic interests are not motivating the western powers—Canada among them—in the Ukraine crisis is yet another lie.

The aggressive drive of the imperialist powers, above all the US, to assert their global hegemony is rooted in a systemic crisis of world capitalism. Through war and threats of war, Washington is seeking to offset the relative decline in the US's economic might and lay claim to resources, markets and strategic territories.

German imperialism, which twice tried to conquer Ukraine in the world wars of the last century so as to annex it to its financial-industrial empire, is eager to realize that objective today. It aims to use Ukraine to supply German industry with cheap-labor and resources.

Canadian imperialism also hopes to directly profit from the confrontation between Russia and the western powers, seeing it as a golden opportunity for Canada to displace Russian oil exports to Europe and overcome opposition within the US to the building of the Keystone XL pipeline (which would transport Alberta tar sands bitumen to heavy oil refineries on the US

Gulf Coast). Following last Monday's meeting of the G-7 government leaders, Harper excitedly announced that they had decided to convene a meeting of their energy ministers to discuss how they could collaborate in the possible future imposition of sanctions targeting Russia's energy sector. Such action would potentially open lucrative opportunities for Canadian energy companies.

Harper's belligerence, lies, and hypocrisy may be news to an international audience, but they will come as no surprise to Canadians.

A neo-conservative—who cuts his political teeth railing against “socialist” Canada (i.e., the existence of Medicare and other social programs) and enthusiastically endorsed the US's 2003 invasion of Iraq on trumped up claims of weapons of mass destruction—Harper and his government exemplify the Canadian ruling class' turn to reaction and authoritarian forms of rule.

While Harper declaims about Russia's reputed violation of the UN Charter in its annexation of Crimea, he and the Canadian elite have supported and participated in the US's systematic trashing of international law: its arrogation of the right to shower drone missiles or invade and occupy any country it chooses (e.g., Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya); its use of torture and illegal detention centers like Guantanamo Bay; and its operation of a global spying network that targets the planet's entire population.

Harper's government is infamous for its attacks on democratic rights, including effectively abolishing the right to strike, sanctioning state spying on Canadians' electronic communications, and its illegal shutdown of parliament in Dec. 2008 to prevent the opposition parties exercising their constitutional right to defeat his government.

In the run-up to Quebec's April 7 election, Canada's elite has again brandished the threat that should Quebec ever secede from the Canadian federal state it could be partitioned—a scarcely veiled threat of ethnic civil war. Harper, it need be recalled, has boasted that, as the policy director for the rightwing populist, anglo-chauvinist Reform Party, he was one of the originators of the partition threat—which was subsequently incorporated in the Chretien Liberal government's Clarity Act.

The opposition parties have all accommodated to and participated in the Canadian ruling class' lurch to the right, be it the dismantling of public services or Canada's participation in US-led imperialist wars. If anything, the Liberals and trade union-supported New Democratic Party have attacked Harper from the right over his attitude toward the Ukraine crisis, saying he hasn't been sufficiently supportive of the pro-western forces (i.e., the ultra-nationalists and fascists) and should take even stronger actions against Moscow.

Responding to Moscow's imposition earlier this week of retaliatory sanctions (effectively a travel ban) on a dozen Canadian government official and politicians and the head of the UCC, NDP leader Thomas Mulcair declared, “If that's the price to pay to start sending a message to Putin, so be it.” He then called on “the world community” to “come together and start imposing far more consequential sanctions” if Russia does not forthwith submit to US, German and Canadian demands regarding the Crimea and Ukraine.

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