

Canada's Prime Minister Spearheads Attack on Russia at G-20 Summit

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Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper took the lead in the hostile reception accorded to Russian President Vladimir Putin at last weekend's G-20 summit in Brisbane, Australia.

In an incident widely reported in the Canadian and international media, Harper grudgingly accepted Putin's offer of a handshake and declared, "You need to get out of Ukraine." Harper's aggressive pose set the tone for the conference, where the western powers worked to further isolate Russia, including discussing plans to step up economic sanctions over Ukraine.

Harper's provocative gesture illustrates Canadian imperialism's ever more aggressive role in global geopolitical conflicts.

Ottawa gave its full backing to the fascist-led coup in Kyiv last February that led to the overthrow of the elected president, Victor Yanukovitch, and the installation of the pro-western regime under current President Petro Poroshenko. Harper was the first foreign leader to visit Kyiv in the wake of the coup.

This was part of a long-standing Canadian intervention in Ukraine. In close alliance with the US National Endowment for Democracy, Canada has long funded pro-western Ukrainian "civil society" groups and political parties using a government-supported network of Ukrainian-Canadian businessman and ethnic organizations. Many of the latter hail the ultranationalists who collaborated with the Nazis during World War II and their leader Stepan Bandera.

When Ukrainian President Poroshenko paid a visit to Ottawa in September, he complimented Canada's Conservative government and the entire political establishment for their firm backing for the Kyiv regime. In a speech to parliament, he hailed Canada's supply of nonlethal military equipment to the Ukrainian army and its diplomatic efforts on the international stage, declaring, "No one, with the possible exception of Poland, was so straightforward and earnest in sending a signal across the world to the Russians."

This "signal" has included Canada assuming a major role in NATO's efforts to encircle Moscow by positioning air power in the Baltic region and carrying out military exercises in Eastern Europe. Canadian aircraft based in the Baltic were involved in the interception of Russian military aircraft last month when they were in international airspace.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the Harper government has moved to place Canada in the frontline in the US-led drive to contain and strategically encircle China. Last November, Ottawa concluded a secret agreement with Washington on military collaboration in the Asia-

Pacific region, the “Asia-Pacific Defence Policy Cooperation Framework.” The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is also seeking to establish “forward bases” in Asia, including in South Korea and Singapore.

Harper arrived at the G-20 summit fresh from a visit to New Zealand, the first by a Canadian prime minister in 19 years. According to a report of his visit, topics discussed included security sharing—like Canada, New Zealand is one of the US National Security Agency’s “Five Eyes” surveillance allies— and issues surrounding the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

The US-led TPP aims to exclude China from closer Pacific economic cooperation and place the US and its allies in the driver’s seat in establishing the rules of the capitalist world economic order in the 21st century. A week prior to his G-20 trip, Harper provocatively met with US President Barack Obama and other TPP participants in the US embassy in Beijing.

Canada’s increasingly aggressive posture, alongside that of the US and the other imperialist powers, is being driven by the ongoing capitalist crisis. Six years after the 2008 economic crash, economic conditions today are even more fragile.

In spite of the signs of growing recessionary and deflationary tendencies around the world, Harper hailed the G-20’s empty commitment to boost global growth in coming years, a commitment that even the IMF has raised doubts over. Referring to the measures the G-20 leaders agreed on, Harper said, “It basically has to do with things like the capitalization of banks, rescue plans in place before you have bankruptcies, things that would avoid a financial collapse like we had in 2008.”

Defending the G-20’s record, he went on, “We know from the ’08-’09 crisis that there are times when no national government, no matter how important—not even the biggest in the world—are going to be able to deal with macroeconomic developments at the global level.”

Harper’s comments on economic conditions could not be further from the truth. Not only have none of the fundamental problems which led to the 2008 crisis been resolved, they have intensified over the past six years. And his attempt to promote the G-20 as a body promoting global cooperation in contrast to the narrow interests of national governments was thoroughly undermined by events at last weekend’s summit, dominated as it was by the attempts of the imperialist powers to isolate Russia.

In Canada, Harper’s calculated insult to Putin was universally hailed by the media and opposition parties. Paul Dewar, foreign affairs spokesman for the trade union-aligned New Democratic Party (NDP), berated Harper from the right for restricting his protest to mere words. “To be direct is fine, but it’s a matter of what you follow it up with. I’m not sure beyond the handshake and the chastisement from Harper what was achieved,” he told the *Globe and Mail*.

For the Liberals, MP Chrystia Freeland commented, “There has been in the past few days a really worrying escalation of the Russian military presence in eastern Ukraine. Strong rhetorical support for Ukraine is essential and strong action in support of Ukraine is essential too.”

Media reaction was similarly enthusiastic. CBC carried a report describing the positive response in the Australian press to “the Prime Minister’s bold admonishment to Putin.” The

article went on to note a report in Australia's *Business Insider* which claimed that Harper had shown Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbot how to "shirtfront" Putin, an Australian expression meaning to knock someone to the ground.

Harper's aggressive intervention at the G-20 summit came just weeks after Canada joined the US military in its latest war of aggression in the Middle East. Since November 2, Canadian CF-18 fighter jets have been dropping bombs on ISIS targets within Iraq. Although Canada's deployment is formally restricted to six months, there are open discussions that the conflict will last many years, with one of its ultimate goals being the overthrow of Syria's Assad regime, a close ally of Russia and Iran.

Although Ottawa is moving in close alliance with the United States on all major geopolitical issues, there are serious and mounting tensions between the two countries.

This was illustrated in comments made by Obama just prior to the G-20 summit on the Keystone-XL gas pipeline, a project designed to transport Canadian oil from the tar sands in Alberta to the US Gulf Coast. Responding to a question about the likelihood of the project going ahead now that the Republicans have won control of congress, US President Barack Obama signaled that were the US House of Representatives and Senate to pass a bill for the pipeline to be built, he would veto it.

"Keystone XL just gets Canadian oil to world markets, it doesn't help the US consumer," said Obama. "Understand what this project is: it is providing the ability of Canada to pump their oil, send it through our land, down to the Gulf, where it will be sold everywhere else."

Harper has made the approval of Keystone a top priority, declaring that its benefits are "a no brainer." The energy sector is one of the most significant sources of economic growth in Canada, which is why Keystone has been heavily promoted by Canadian big business and the Conservative government.

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