

Canada to dramatically escalate its role in Mideast war

By Keith Jones
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Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper has announced a major escalation of Canada's role in the new US-led war in the Middle East.

Speaking in Parliament Friday, Harper said that six CF-18 fighter planes will be deployed to mount bombing raids in Iraq and possibly Syria as part of a six-month Canadian Armed Forces' "counter-terrorism" mission.

According to Harper, the aim of this mission is to significantly "degrade the capabilities" of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which also goes under the name the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

Harper is being disingenuous at best. He, his Conservative government, and the Canadian military know full well that the shoring up of the pro-US regime in Baghdad and its allies in the Kurdish Regional Government against ISIS is only an initial, partial aim of the "coalition of the willing" assembled by the US and for which they signed up Canada virtually from the get-go.

The true target of the war coalition—which now includes Britain and France, respectively Iraq and Syria's former colonial overlords, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Gulf State absolutist Sheikdoms—is the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad.

The US is determined to oust Assad, who is a close ally of Iran and Russia, as part of its longstanding military-strategic drive to secure untrammled domination of the Middle East, the world's principal oil exporting region.

For the past three-and-a-half years all the member-states of the coalition, and especially the US, France, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, have been sponsoring a "regime change" war in Syria, financing and arming Islamacist forces—including ISIS—as their proxy army against Assad.

While Canada's government and those of other western powers are highlighting the coalition's anti-ISIS mandate, making convenient use of its sectarian atrocities

to overcome popular opposition to another western military intervention in the Middle East; in Turkey, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the region the coalition's member governments are making no secret of the fact that the war's real objective is Assad's overthrow.

Already the US is carrying out bombing missions in Syria. At present these are targeting ISIS and allied groups. But Washington has repeatedly said that were the Syrian government to try to assert its national sovereignty under international law and interdict the US warplanes, it would treat this as an act of war—i.e. an excuse for an all-out attack on Syria.

In his Friday speech, Harper announced that Canada will also be contributing to the war coalition an air-to-air refueling aircraft and two Aurora surveillance planes. While the government did not provide figures, it is estimated that 350 CAF personnel will have to be deployed to the Middle East to fly and maintain the planes.

The government has also said that the deployment of CAF special forces to northern Iraq will be extended for a further six months. Earlier this week, Defence Minister Rob Nicholson said 26 Special Forces' troops were in northern Iraq to advise and train Kurdish Peshmerga militia. This deployment, which was slated for 30 days when it was first announced at the end of August, could ultimately involve as many as 69 CAF elite troops.

The government has insisted that this "advise and training" role in no way contradicts its pledge that the CAF mission will not involve any "troops on the ground" or in combat.

In announcing Canada's greatly expanded role in the new Mideast war, Harper resorted to standard Manichean "war on terror" rhetoric. He trumpeted ISIS's crimes against civilians and portrayed Canada's intervention as motivated entirely by humanitarian concerns and reputed ISIS threats to attack Canadians.

Needless to say, Harper avoided any mention of how ISIS is itself a direct product of the monstrous crimes carried out by US imperialism—crimes that have been aided and abetted by Canada. These include: the illegal 2003 invasion of Iraq, which blew up Iraqi society; the US's subsequent manipulation and fanning of communal sectarian divisions in Iraq as part of a “divide and rule” strategy; and the use of Islamacist forces as the spearhead of the “successful” NATO 2011 “regime change” war in Libya and the proxy war the US and its allies have fomented in Syria.

Even Postmedia, one of Canada's major newspaper chains, noted in an article published this week that were Canada to deploy CF-18s to Iraq they would very likely end up bombing Islamacist fighters for whom CAF pilots had provided air cover during the NATO campaign to topple the Libyan regime of Muammar Gaddafi. With CIA encouragement, thousands of Islamacist fighters flocked from Libya to Syria after Gaddafi's overthrow, many if not most of them ultimately joining ISIS.

In his parliamentary address Harper made clear that his government views Canada's participation in the Iraq-Syria war as vital to ensure the Canadian ruling elite has a say and a share in the spoils of the imperialist reordering and redivision of the Middle East. “Being a free rider,” declared Harper, “means you are not taken seriously.”

Just two months ago, in a speech on the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, Harper celebrated that orgy of destruction as marking Canada's emergence as a “great power.” “When the great nations of the world gathered,” said Harper, “we must never forget that our place at the table ... was bought and paid for on the gas-choked field of Ypres ... at Vimy Ridge, ... in the long muddy slaughter along the River Somme; in the drenched and cratered wasteland of Passchendaele.” (See: “Canada's Harper marks World War I with bellicose address”)

Harper's dismissal of “free-riders” was in part directed at the opposition parties. The NDP, Liberals and Greens have all made clear that they share Harper's and Washington's principal war aims, including the overthrow of the Assad regime. However, well aware that there is no enthusiasm within the Canadian population for the CAF playing a leading role in another imperialist war, they have thus far withheld their support for Canada participating in the Iraq bombing campaign.

Repeatedly during the past weeks the Liberals said they would be open to supporting the deployment of Canadian

fighter jets. But after Harper's Friday speech, Liberal leader Justin Trudeau said his party believes Canada “can make a more helpful contribution to the international effort” against ISIS by helping to build up Iraqi institutions, including its repressive state apparatus, and providing “humanitarian assistance.”

NDP leader Thomas Mulcair said the Official Opposition could not give its support to the government's planned deployment because “the prime minister hasn't outlined a broad strategic blueprint for the mission.” Mulcair expressed concern that the intervention could end in a quagmire, while the party's foreign affairs critic Paul Dewar said the NDP feared that Canadian bombing missions against ISIS in Syria could bolster Assad's regime.

Both Mulcair and Trudeau made reference to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. They did so, however, from the standpoint that it had ill-served western interests—not that it was part of an ongoing, Canadian-supported US imperialist drive to strengthen Washington's military-strategic dominance of the Middle East. And that the new Mideast war is the continuation and escalation of that drive.

The opposition parties have supported Canada's whole-hearted participation in one US-led war of aggression after another, from the 1999 NATO war on Yugoslavia, through the Afghan War and the 2011 regime change war in Libya. They have also stood shoulder to shoulder with the Harper government in its provocative promotion of the US-German drive to detach Ukraine from Russia's sphere of influence.

The Liberal-NDP opposition to “Harper's Mideast war” is a cynical maneuver motivated by the approach of the 2015 federal election and concern that Canada's prolonged involvement in a bloody imperialist war in the Middle East could give rise to social opposition outside establishment channels.

A parliamentary vote on the new six-month CAF war deployment will be held next week, but as the Conservatives have a majority its outcome is a foregone conclusion.

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