

# Trudeau commits Canada to major role in Mideast war

By Roger Jordan  
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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, attending his first international summit since sweeping to power in last month's federal election, pledged that Canada would step up its involvement in the US-led war in Iraq and Syria.

Trudeau and other senior government officials made the comments in the wake of Friday's terrorist atrocity in Paris, which killed 129 people and injured hundreds more. Speaking from the G-20 in Turkey, Trudeau declared, "I know that Canada will continue to, and be seen to be continuing to do, its part in the fight against this terrorist scourge."

Finance Minister Bill Morneau underscored the point Sunday, stating, "We have committed to bring back the CF-18 (warplanes). But in the broader context, we remain absolutely committed to the (US war) coalition."

Emphasizing that Canada's military will remain active in the war, Morneau continued, "We believe we do need to be part of the fight to degrade and destroy ISIL. We only question the way that we should best do that."

These remarks were delivered in response to a growing clamour from sections of Canada's ruling elite for the Liberal government to revisit its election campaign pledge to end Canada's "combat mission" in Iraq and Syria, while expanding the training of Iraqi and Kurdish proxies on the ground.

Since the October 19 federal election, Trudeau has hedged on the issue of withdrawing the CF-18s. He has refused to name a date and stressed that any alteration in Canada's role will be carried out "responsibly" and in close consultation with the US and other allies.

In the meantime, Canada's CF-18s are continuing to fly bombing missions. In fact, since Trudeau was formally sworn in as prime minister they have stepped up their attacks in both Iraq and Syria.

Seizing on the Paris events, former defence minister and prospective Conservative leadership candidate Jason Kenney attacked the government's plan to recall the CF-18s in belligerent tones. Mocking Foreign Minister Stephane Dion's affirmation that Canada will show "absolute resolution" in the fight against ISIS, Kenney declared, "We will show 'absolute resolve' by being the only country to withdraw from airstrikes against the perpetrators?"

Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall, who has emerged as a

leading spokesman for the Conservative right in the wake of the defeat of the Harper government, has also publicly demanded that the Canadian Armed Forces' bombing mission continue. "Yesterday's attack," he declared in a press statement, "was a deadly reminder that there are people in the world ... who will stop at nothing in their attempts to impose their twisted, evil ideology through violence, destruction and death. They must be defeated. There truly is no other option."

Phillip Couillard, the Liberal Premier of Quebec, was equally bellicose. "The democratic world is at war," he proclaimed. "It is naive to think that we are not facing a state of war, different from the wars we have known, but equally threatening."

Large sections of the media have weighed in to demand that Trudeau reverse his election pledge, with many commentators arguing that failure to do so will weaken relations with the US and NATO, alliances which are vital to upholding Canadian imperialism's global predatory interests.

In a column that appeared in Monday's *Globe and Mail*, Lawrence Martin wrote, "when circumstances change, leaders of statesmanlike quality need to show a readiness to change with them. With the terror from Islamic State escalating, and with France promising to expand the war against the terror network, circumstances have indeed changed."

Writing in the same newspaper, Wesley Wark, a former senior adviser to the Conservative government on national security and border control, called Trudeau's pledge to end Canada's participation in combat activity "unsustainable." "France," he claimed, "will expect its allies, including Canada, to assist it in a renewed campaign, with the target being an assault from the air and on land against Islamic State's headquarters in Raqqa."

Right-wing political forces are exploiting the aftermath of the Paris attacks to advance their longstanding criticism of the Liberals' plan to end Canada's participation in the bombing campaign. In an article that appeared prior to Friday's terrorist atrocity in Paris, *Maclean's* magazine suggested that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) had played a decisive role in Thursday's capture of Sinjar in northern Iraq by Kurdish Peshmerga forces. According to the article, the rout of the Islamic Forces in Sinjar was made possible by Canadian CF-18 bombing and CAF Special Forces active on the ground.

While the article avoided providing specifics on what the Special Forces troops actually did to assist the capture of Sinjar, there is much evidence to suggest that the 70 CAF soldiers deployed to Iraq to provide “training” are engaged in front-line fighting and the directing of air strikes by coalition jets.

CBC reported on Monday that the Pentagon has said that Coalition ground forces were active during the Sinjar operation, helping Kurdish troops to identify targets from positions on Sinjar mountain, to the town’s north. The CBC report noted that Canada’s military has refused to deny that Canadian Special Forces were involved in this operation, adding that the expansive “training” mandate the Conservative government gave them still stands. Under this mandate, Canadian Special Forces personnel can accompany Kurdish Peshmerga to the front line and call in air strikes. In a briefing last January, CAF General Michael Rouleau estimated that approximately 20 percent of the Special Forces’ time in Iraq is spent conducting such frontline activities.

These latest revelations make a mockery of the Liberals’ pose of opposition to the CAF “combat mission.” Under their proposed plan “ending” a Canadian “combat mission” in the Middle East, the Liberals intend to expand the Canadian military’s “advise and assist” mission in Iraq. Most likely this will be done by significantly increasing the number of Special Forces troops deployed in Iraq, but it could also involve broadening their mandate to include other activities.

Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan stressed in an interview last Thursday that Canada built up valuable experience in counter-insurgency warfare and in training “local” fighting forces as a result of its leading role in the US-led neocolonial occupation of Afghanistan. Sajjan, it should be noted, is himself a decorated Afghan war veteran.

While Trudeau is currently spurning the demand that he shelve his CF-18 pledge, he went out of his way Monday to emphasize his government’s support for the US-NATO offensive against Russia. Speaking to reporters about his brief meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the G-20 meeting, Trudeau boasted that he had told Putin that Russia should “get out” of Ukraine.

Trudeau’s pledge to end Canada’s role in the bombing of Iraq and Syria was a cynical election ploy aimed at appealing to popular opposition to the Harper government’s bellicose foreign policy. It was coupled with the echoing of ruling class criticism of Harper for “mismanaging” relations with Washington and bungling the modernization of Canada’s Armed Forces.

In his first days in office, Trudeau has reaffirmed his pledge to strengthen Canada’s military capabilities as part of a concerted drive to deepen the country’s strategic partnership with US imperialism. He has officially committed his government to implementing the major increases in military spending the Harper government announced in its last budget

and has reassured the armed forces that his government will press ahead with the procurement of a wide range of new military equipment.

The Conservatives and their right-wing allies have also seized on the events in Paris to renew Harper’s campaign against the admission of more than a token number of Syrian refugees on the grounds that they constitute a “security risk.” In an open letter to Trudeau, Saskatchewan Premier Wall has demanded he renege on his pledge to accept 25,000 Syrian refugees before the end of the year, saying the Paris attacks show the need for a “redoubling” of security and that a “date-driven” or “numbers-driven” resettlement program will endanger Canadians.

Such reactionary pronouncements follow on from the Conservatives’ far right election campaign, which included the whipping up of Islamophobia over the niqab issue.

On Saturday evening, a mosque in Peterborough, Ontario, suffered severe damage after a burning projectile was thrown through its window, triggering a fire. The incident, which occurred just one hour after the conclusion of a child’s birthday party at the venue, resulted in over \$100,000 in damages.

On Monday, the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) expressed concern over an anti-Muslim “backlash” in the wake of the Paris terrorist attacks. “In our experience, following these kinds of tragedies or when Islam or Muslims are portrayed negatively in the media, we do tend to notice a spike in the number of hate crimes and hate incidents that are reported to NCCM,” said the organization’s executive director, Ihsaan Gardee.

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