

Canadian elite seizes on Burkina Faso terrorist attack to push militarist agenda

By Roger Jordan
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Leading Canadian politicians and the corporate media have reacted to last Friday's terrorist attack in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, by stepping up calls for Canada to expand its participation in US- and French-led military interventions in the Middle East and Africa.

The attack on the Splendid Hotel and the nearby Cappuccino Café has been claimed by Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). It cost the lives of 28 people from 18 countries, including six Canadians. The previous day a terrorist attack in Jakarta, Indonesia killed six people, including a Canadian.

French forces were flown in from neighboring Mali to help regain control of the situation in Ouagadougou, as gunmen held up to 126 hostages for 23 hours. Ultimately four attackers were killed by a combination of Burkina Faso and French security forces.

In response to the attacks, the governments of Burkina Faso and Mali have announced stepped up intelligence collaboration. AQIM was also behind the attack on a hotel in Bamako, Mali, last November, which killed 20.

With the assistance of France, the former colonial power, the Malian government has been engaged in fighting with Islamist rebels in the country's north since 2012.

A Canadian government official said Tuesday that Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officers have been deployed to Ouagadougou to "help in any way they can" with investigations into the attack.

The Liberal government has seized on the incident to promote an expansion of Canada's role in the so-called "war on terror" beyond the current Canadian Armed Forces deployment to Iraq and Syria.

Speaking at a cabinet meeting in New Brunswick, Foreign Minister Stephane Dion declared the attacks in Burkina Faso and Indonesia proved the need for Canada to increase its military interventions around the globe. "You have seen it in Burkina Faso, Turkey, Paris and we are affected by that and we need to fight with our allies," stated Dion. This means Canada has to develop "strong co-operation with our allies," continued Dion, their "military, police and intelligence services."

Dion's remarks were in part aimed at allaying mounting concern within the bourgeoisie over the new government's election pledge to withdraw Canadian fighter jets from the

bombing of Islamic State targets in Iraq and Syria.

The Liberals have repeatedly vowed that they intend for Canada to remain a major contributor to the US-led Mideast war coalition. While they have yet to detail their plans, Trudeau and Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan have indicated that Canada will send additional Special Forces to "advise and assist" Kurdish Peshmerga fighters in Iraq, keep two surveillance planes and a refueling aircraft in Kuwait to help the bombing of Iraq and Syria, and possibly deploy regular troops to Jordan to train Iraqi army forces.

However, the media and Conservative opposition are clamoring that this is not enough. Their concern is that the withdrawal of the six CF-18 fighter jets will weaken Canada's position in what is rapidly emerging as a new, US-led imperialist partition of the Middle East, as well as undermine Canada's leverage with Washington.

A slew of newspaper op-ed comments took Trudeau to task for his purported tepid response to the events in Ouagadougou. "Where is the fury and resolve to fight back? Trudeau's silence on terrorism is deafening," screamed the headline of a comment by the *National Post's* Michael Den Tandt. In the *Globe and Mail*, Lysiane Gagnon complained that Trudeau had visited a mosque in Ontario which was firebombed as part of a wave of Islamophobic attacks, but failed to make an appearance at the memorial service in Quebec City for the six Canadians who lost their lives in Burkina Faso.

Media outlets also prominently featured the comments of the mother of one of the Canadian victims in the Burkina Faso attacks, who denounced the Liberal government for its intention to withdraw the six CF-18s from the bombing campaign against Iraq and Syria.

Conservative politicians launched their own tirades against Trudeau and his Liberals after it was revealed late Monday that Sajjan had not been invited to a meeting of western defence ministers in Paris to discuss intensifying the war in Iraq and Syria. The media quickly joined in, proclaiming that Canada's absence from the Paris discussions showed that the country is being sidelined in global affairs because the new government is not pulling its weight.

"If the perception of being a freeloader somehow gains traction in Washington, it inevitably has policy spillovers," said

Geroge Petrolekas, a retired CAF colonel and frequent op-ed contributor to the *Globe* and other dailies. “That’s deeply inimical to our interests.”

Sajjan, for his part, sought to downplay what was clearly a US-engineered snub aimed at pressing Ottawa to back down on its plan to withdraw the fighter jets.

The ruling elite is determined that Canada continue to expand its role in military interventions around the globe, so as to strengthen ties with the US, its principal military-security partner, and aggressively assert its own increasingly global imperialist interests.

Under the previous government, Canada established itself as a key partner of US imperialism in its three major geostrategic offensives: in Eastern Europe and the Baltic to encircle European Russia; in the Middle East to extend Washington’s hegemony over the world’s most important oil-producing region; and in the Asia-Pacific, as part of the Obama administration’s “pivot,” aimed at isolating China economically and confronting it militarily.

Almost since the day the Liberals took office, most of the media has been urging the government to renege on its election fighter-jet promise, and nearly three months since they took the reins of power the new government has yet to spell out when the jets will be recalled.

Whatever the ultimate decisions on the CF-18s, the Liberals have gotten the message and are determined to reassure the ruling elite that they have no qualms about using Canadian military power and will not allow Canada to cede ground to its geo-political rivals.

Toward this end, the government is carrying out discussions with Canada’s military allies about deploying Canadian military forces in north and west Africa. Canada has already provided transportation aircraft to assist with the moving of troops and military equipment involved in France’s Operation Barkhane, a mission launched in 2014 covering its former colonial possessions stretching from Mali in the west to Chad in Central Africa.

David Pratt, a former Liberal Defence Minister and member of the Global Affairs Institute, wrote in a *Globe* comment that the Burkina Faso attack demonstrated that “the fight against Islamic State and its confederates ranges well beyond Syria and Iraq.” Pratt urged Canada to join France in promoting security cooperation between Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad and Niger. “Canada,” he argued, “is uniquely positioned to make a very valuable contribution in the region with logistical and engineering support, strategic airlift and perhaps some more trainers and Special Forces.”

Behind the rhetoric about “peacekeeping” and combatting terrorism, any Canadian intervention on the African continent will be aimed principally at advancing the interests of Canadian imperialism in the region. Canadian companies, particularly in the areas of mining and infrastructure, have large investments across the continent. In Burkina Faso alone, Canadian

companies control a majority stake in three of the country’s five biggest mines. Total mining assets amount to \$1.6 billion. Across the continent, over \$25 billion has been invested by Canadian companies in mining operations.

In 2014, the previous Conservative government placed Burkina Faso on Ottawa’s priority list, meaning that the country was seen as vital to foreign policy interests and should be targeted for additional development aid. Other countries in the region receiving similar focus include Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Canada’s military has extensive experience operating on the continent. Over recent years, Canadian Special Forces have been deployed to Niger as part of Operation Flintlock, a US-led operation which seeks to improve the capacities of the special forces of Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal.

Canada also has a small contingent of peacekeeping troops deployed to the Sinai region of Egypt to police the “peace” agreement between Cairo and Israel. The possibility that their presence could be exploited to justify a larger CAF deployment in the event that groups aligned to ISIS gain strength in the Sinai was made clear when Sajjan visited Egypt on his Middle East tour last month.

Canada’s military played an important role in neighboring Libya during the 2011 NATO-led war to topple the Gaddafi regime, supplying a fleet of CF-18s to conduct air strikes and also the general who commanded NATO’s air operations. On a visit to London in December, Sajjan discussed steps to pacify Libya with his British counterpart Michael Fallon. Under conditions where the German government has made clear it will send troops to Libya as soon as a so-called unity government has been established under the auspices of the UN, and Britain has pledged troops to train Libyan government forces, Canada’s Liberal government is undoubtedly deliberating on whether to follow suit.

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