

Canada's parliament endorses expanded role in Mideast war

By Roger Jordan
10 March 2016

Canada's House of Commons voted Tuesday in favour of the Liberal government's plan to expand the country's role in the US-led war in Iraq and Syria.

A motion approving the Liberal plan for Canada's military to play a leading role in the US-led war coalition for at least two more years passed by 178 votes to 147, with the Liberals voting in favour and the opposition Conservatives, NDP and Bloc Quebecois against.

Announced by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau last month, the new plan will see a trebling of the number of Canadian Special Forces troops deployed in Iraq to more than 200. These forces are to "advise and assist" Kurdish Peshmerga fighters in northern Iraq.

The 69 fighters Canada has deployed in the region on the same mandate since late 2014 have been involved in frontline combat, including direct exchanges of fire with Islamic State (ISIS) forces. Military officials this week confirmed four occasions since the fall of 2014 in which Canadian forces engaged in firefights with ISIS militants.

The plan also calls for additional financial support to Jordan and Lebanon to deal with refugees and for six CF-18 fighter jets to be withdrawn from bombing targets in Iraq and Syria. The surveillance and refueling aircraft that the previous Conservative government deployed to the Mideast in the fall of 2014 are to continue assisting the US-led bombing campaign.

The Liberal government is also increasing the total number of military personnel seconded to the US war coalition from 650 to 830. This includes senior officers who will provide additional support for the coalition's command and intelligence structures, and potentially a team to advise the Iraqi Defence Ministry in Baghdad modelled on a Canadian team of experts that operated for several years within the Afghan government.

Making a mockery of the Liberals' claims to have ended Canada's combat mission in the Middle East, Chief of the Defence Staff General Jonathan Vance told parliament Tuesday that the Special Forces would be authorized to shoot first if they detected "hostile intent" from Islamic

State militants. "The rules of engagement...allow Canadian forces to defend themselves," Vance told the House of Commons defence committee, "[to] anticipate their defence so they can engage a hostile act...or an intent before it materializes. In other words...we can anticipate to protect ourselves."

A day earlier, Vance told the Senate defence committee that a key element of the Canadian Armed Forces' mission will be to help identify and form a battalion of around 600 Kurdish fighters who are to be given more advanced training so as to create a Kurdish special forces unit. This unit will ultimately be tasked with leading major attacks, including potentially the long-discussed assault on Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul, currently held by ISIS.

The Liberal government's expansion of Canada's Mideast war intervention exposes the thoroughly fraudulent character of the anti-war pose it sought to strike in last year's federal election by calling for the withdrawal of the CF-18s.

In reality, the Liberals—and indeed the entire Canadian ruling class—are fully on board with Washington's drive to consolidate US hegemony over the world's most important oil-producing region, as well as its strategic offensives against Russia and China.

Washington's reckless policy of never-ending war has thrown the entire Middle East into chaos, forcing millions to flee their homes and costing the lives of millions more.

The current US-led intervention is only further exacerbating ethnic and regional tensions. The Kurdish Peshmerga with whom the Canadian Special Forces are operating are seeking to establish an independent Kurdistan through the partition of Iraq and Syria along Sunni, Shia and Kurdish lines. In a report earlier this year, Amnesty International accused the Peshmerga of war crimes, including burning down Arab villages retaken from Islamic State forces so as to expel the local Arab population.

In the month since Trudeau unveiled Canada's new Mideast war plan, his government has deployed four CF-18 fighter jets to participate in a training mission in Romania, a move clearly aimed at stepping up the US-led encirclement

and isolation of Russia in eastern Europe. Canada has been one of the staunchest supporters of the pro-Western regime in Kiev, which was brought to power in a Western-sponsored coup two years ago and is now waging war against pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. Ottawa has also provided air, sea and land support to NATO's aggressive operations aimed at Moscow in eastern Europe and the Baltic and Black Seas.

By pursuing aggressive militarist policies in the Middle East, eastern Europe, and the Asia-Pacific as part of Washington's "pivot" or "rebalance" to Asia, the Canadian ruling elite is determined to strengthen its longstanding strategic collaboration with US imperialism, so as to uphold its own predatory global interests.

The parliamentary vote on the Liberals' Mideast war plan was held two days prior to Trudeau travelling to Washington, where President Obama will host a state dinner for him today. Intensified Canadian-US military and security cooperation, including in the Arctic, is expected to be high on the agenda of the Obama-Trudeau summit.

Discussion is already well under way within Canadian ruling circles about further military interventions. Last month, in the wake of talks with his NATO counterparts, Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan indicated that Canada is considering involvement in a new military mission in Libya. The country was plunged into chaos following NATO's air war in 2011 that toppled the Gaddafi regime. Recent reports have revealed that US and French Special Forces are already operating in Libya, one of Africa's principal oil producers, under the pretext of combatting the Islamic State.

Yesterday, the Montreal daily *Le Devoir* reported that Ottawa is considering deploying up to 2,000 army and police personnel to Haiti and assuming the leadership of the UN "peacekeeping" force that has occupied that country since the US, with Canada's military support, ousted the country's elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, in 2004.

Canada has longstanding economic and geo-political interests in Haiti and the broader Caribbean. Recently Canada "helped" Haiti "modernize" its mining code—that is, make it more amenable to Canada's mining companies.

There are also growing calls from Canada's national-security establishment and corporate media for the government to substantially hike military spending. The Liberals have promised a comprehensive defence review by the end of 2016, prompting numerous journalists and think tanks to declare that more resources need to be deployed in asserting Canadian strategic interests around the globe. Some of the most significant proposals already being raised are an expansion of the military's presence the Arctic, joining the US ballistic missile defence shield and increasing annual military spending to 2 percent of GDP.

Following his appearance in parliament Monday, Vance weighed into the debate, supporting calls for the purchase of weaponized drones for Canada's military. Referring to conflicts like those in Iraq, he declared that there is little point in purchasing such vehicles if they cannot fire weapons.

The media has continued to be critical of the Liberals' new Mideast war plan, focusing above all on Trudeau's supposed failure to provide a rationale for the withdrawal of the fighter jets.

None of the parties that voted against the Liberals' motion to expand Canada's role in the Mideast war have any disagreement with the Canadian elite's aggressive, militarist agenda. The Conservatives voted against the motion based on the demagogic and bellicose claim that the withdrawal of the CF-18 fighter jets means Canada is shirking its duty to lead the "war on terrorism."

The Conservatives' claims were echoed by the pro-Quebec-independence Bloc Quebecois (BQ). During last year's election campaign, the BQ joined with the Conservatives in attacking the New Democratic Party (NDP) for being "soft" on terrorism and whipping up a reactionary chauvinist campaign over Muslim women wearing the niqab at citizenship ceremonies.

The social-democratic NDP took the government to task for its lack of clarity on whether the new plan is for a "combat" mission and when it will end. Party leader Thomas Mulcair insisted that the NDP is fully behind Canada remaining part of the US-led war coalition, but argued it should focus on providing "humanitarian" support. This exemplifies the lack of any principled opposition within the NDP to Canadian imperialist operations in the Middle East and around the world.

The NDP in fact voted in favour of the 2011 NATO-led bombardment of Libya, promoting the lie that it was aimed at providing "humanitarian" assistance to the population. As part of its openly right-wing, Harper-lite election campaign last fall, the NDP also vowed to increase military spending and equip Canada's armed forces with better weapons so as to enable them to intervene more actively around the globe.

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>