

US war plans panic Canada's elite

Keith Jones
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Echoing the concerns of many European politicians and editorial writers, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien has counselled the US not to embark on a unilateral military campaign to topple the Iraqi government.

Speaking in Moscow last Thursday at a joint press conference with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chrétien reiterated his government's support for the US occupation of Afghanistan and its purported world anti-terrorism war. However, he then joined Putin in de-linking the US-Iraqi dispute from the question of terrorism. "The question of the production of unacceptable armaments in Iraq," affirmed Chrétien, "is a problem that is under the authority of the United Nations, and it is completely different than the problem of terrorism."

Chrétien urged the US to work in concert with its traditional allies and through the UN Security Council, rather than act on its own against Iraq. "If we try to do it unilaterally," said Canada's Prime Minister, "it will go absolutely nowhere."

Later the same day, Canada's External Affairs Minister made like comments while on his maiden ministerial visit to Washington. After meeting with US Secretary of State Colin Powell, Graham declared, "Nobody is supporting [Iraqi President] Saddam Hussein but everybody recognizes that in international politics, you have to have a process in which, before you invade a sovereign country, there has to be a reason for it or we're going to lead to international chaos."

The Canadian government has far from closed the door on supporting or even joining a US-led assault on Iraq. Both Chrétien and Graham have indicated that were the US to demonstrate a tie between the Iraqi regime and the September 11 terrorist attacks, Canada would support US retaliatory action, including an invasion of Iraq. And at his Washington press conference, Graham made the strongest statement to date of Canada's readiness to participate in a sequel to the 1991 Gulf War, if only the US could obtain UN sanction. Speaking of the Iraqi regime, Graham said, "If it is shown that they are amassing weapons of mass destruction with a vision of using them against someone in the immediate future, that's a clear and present danger that we and all the world have to address and we'd be willing to address."

In an appearance before a US Senate committee last week, Colin Powell asserted a US right to wage war against Iraq, if need be alone and without UN sanction. However, nothing that either US or Canadian leaders have said precludes the Bush administration soliciting and winning Canadian support for a UN motion on Iraqi disarmament, so crafted as to ensure its rejection by Baghdad and a pretext for a US-led war on Iraq.

That said, Chrétien's remarks do reflect genuine and widespread

fears within the Canadian elite over the Bush administration's war plans and flouting of international norms, treaties and alliances.

For its part, so strongly did the US object to Chrétien's comments, that US National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice telephoned the Prime Minister's top foreign policy advisor to demand a clarification. Apparently a major sticking point was whether Chrétien's remarks constituted a "warning" to the US or not.

The official opposition Canadian Alliance was quick to condemn Chrétien's Moscow remarks. Declared Alliance Defence Critic Leon Benoit, "This isn't the time for Canada to weaken its resolve on the war on terrorism. We should be standing shoulder to shoulder with our closest ally." True to form, the *National Post* took an even stronger anti-government line, titling its lead editorial last Friday, "Soft on Saddam." Theirs, however, is the minority view within Canada's elite, at least for now.

The fears of the Canadian ruling class are three-fold. First, that a US war against Iraq will rebound against the interests of the major capitalist powers. "Thoroughly dangerous as Iraq is," argued a recent *Globe and Mail* editorial, "attacking it would be more dangerous still. The likeliest result of such a campaign ... would be that the country would break up and destabilize the entire Middle East."

The second fear of Canada's elite is that the US's refusal to accept the traditional norms of inter-state behaviour—encapsulated in the Bush doctrine that you are either with or against the US—is destabilizing world geo-politics and could ultimately split NATO. A serious rupture between the US and Europe would pull the rug out from the Canadian elite's traditional strategy of resisting US pressure and asserting its own interests by promoting multinational institutions and alliances. Put bluntly, Canada would be pulled even more tightly into the US orbit, thus further reducing the ability of the Canadian bourgeoisie to pursue policies designed to advance its own imperialist interests and ambitions.

Last but not least, Canada's rulers, or at least their most astute representatives, fear that if the US draws Canada into a wider war—Bush and his cabinet cohorts have spoken of years of military strife—class conflict at home will be greatly exacerbated. Already, Canada has come under severe criticism from the US and NATO for not devoting sufficient state resources to its military.

Although the Chrétien Liberal government has seconded the European elite's criticisms of US militarism and unilateralism, the economic and geo-political position of Canadian capital differs fundamentally from that of its European rivals. The most powerful sections of the European bourgeoisie are not anxious for a conflict with the US and like the Chrétien Liberals would probably prefer

that the clock was turned back to before September 11. But through the deepening integration of the European Union and the launch of the Euro, they have built a powerful platform from which to assert their global interests. By contrast, the intensifying inter-capitalist struggle for markets and profits has driven Canadian capital into an ever-tighter economic relationship with the US. Canada's proximity to the US and its dependence on the US market—some 40 percent of Canada's GNP is directly tied to cross-border trade—dictates that in any serious crisis among the imperialist powers, the Canadian bourgeoisie will fall in line with the US.

Deputy Prime Minister Michael Manley admitted as much in a recent interview. After voicing opposition to a unilateral US attack on Iraq, Manley said, "I'm not going to tell you that I think, because we try to cooperate with them [the US], that therefore we're going to influence them. ... If they're going to make a decision on Iraq for example, it's their decision. They'll hear us. They'll hear the British, the Europeans. They'll make their own decisions. ... I don't think we need to agree with them when we think they're wrong. At the same time we have to realize that there are certain realities here. We are on the North American continent."

The crisis confronting the Canadian elite is above all demonstrated by the fact that even as Chrétien expresses grave reservations about US policy, his government is pursuing closer military/security co-operation with the US as the best means to "maintain influence" in the world, i.e. to stake the Canadian bourgeoisie's claim to a role and share of the spoils in the post-September 11 reordering of the world.

Early last month there was a real sense of elation in Canadian political and media circles when it was announced that Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) infantrymen would be participating in the US campaign to hunt down suspected Taliban and Al Qaeda operatives in southern Afghanistan. The deployment to Kandahar of 750 CAF personnel marks the first time since the Korean War that Canadian ground forces have served under US command.

Even more significantly, Canada has begun formal negotiations with Washington on joining the new Northern Command that the Bush administration has vowed to have in operation by next October. The Northern Command will bring together units from all branches of the US military and other state agencies, including the Coast Guard, in a corps for "homeland defence."

Although no one in Ottawa has dared say so, the US decision to establish the Northern Command rendered NORAD, the more than four decades' old US-Canadian joint-air defence command, obsolete, since Washington's plans call for air, land and territorial defences to all be brought under the new command structure. Defence Minister Art Eggleton and the Canadian military are known to strongly support full Canadian participation in the Northern Command, which would mean that Canadian naval and land forces, will join the Canadian air force in being fully integrated with the US military. The Foreign Affairs Department and Prime Minister's Office are said to fear participation would lead to a major erosion of Canada's ability to assert its independent interests—it would certainly require Canada to drop its opposition to the US deployment of an anti-ballistic missile

system. But, these concerns notwithstanding, the negotiations have begun.

Eggleton and the proponents of CAF participation argue that if Canada fails to join the Northern Command it will lose all influence over US plans to defend the continent and the Canadian military will lose vital access to advanced training and equipment. As for the threat to Canada's ability to pursue an independent foreign policy, or so goes the argument, the Northern Command is only for defence.

One doesn't need to cite military strategy books to refute this claim. When a delegation of Canadian senators visited Washington to discuss the Northern Command, the first question they were asked was where Canada stood on Bush's characterization of Iraq, Iran and North Korea as an "axis of evil." According to the Colin Kenny, Chairman of the Canadian Senate Defence Committee, the US "are looking for friends big-time."

Based on the reports he received from the Canadian senators who made the Washington trip, *Globe and Mail* columnist Hugh Winsor concluded: Canada, will "inevitably" come under pressure to support "US initiatives in Iraq, Iran North Korea or elsewhere" as the price for its participation in US military operations in Afghanistan "and maintaining or intensifying joint military operations in North America."

In the last two decades of the twentieth century, the traditional labor organizations and their national programs proved utterly impotent before capital's global assault on the social position of the working class. The post-September 11 surge of US militarism and the intensifying conflicts between the imperialist powers underscore the urgency of the working class making the program of international socialism the axis of its struggles.



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