

Canada intensifies support for US war on Iraq

Keith Jones
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Canada's Liberal government has served notice that Canada will support and participate in a US-conquest of Iraq and do so irrespective of whether the United Nations Security Council has sanctioned military action.

Speaking on January 9 following a meeting with US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Canadian Defence Minister John McCallum said, "If ... the Security Council authorizes the use of force ... then Canada will definitely be part of that military group."

Asked if Canada would also join a US-led invasion of Iraq if UN authorization was not forthcoming, McCallum said, "Some may say, 'We're doing it only with a UN mandate.' We're saying we much prefer that, but we may do it otherwise.... If the situation is grey or murky, we reserve the right to make our decision at that time."

McCallum revealed that a small delegation of military planners are already in Tampa, Florida, working with the US Central Command to determine the scope and nature of Canada's contribution to a US-led invasion. And the Canadian navy continues to deploy ships in the Persian Gulf where they are working as an integral part of a US aircraft carrier group that is policing the punishing sanctions imposed on Iraq and busily preparing for a Second Gulf War.

McCallum cast his comment about Canadian participation in a US invasion without UN Security Council sanction in the conditional. But it has been widely and correctly interpreted as signaling that the Canadian government will stand with the US in its drive to unseat Saddam Hussein and occupy Iraq come what may. "We will, in other words, likely go with pretty much whatever the United States sets out to achieve," declared Canada's most important daily, the *Globe and Mail*, in an editorial that parsed McCallum's

remarks.

This is a significant, if predictable, shift in the Liberal government's position on the US-Iraq conflict. In a year-end television interview, Prime Minister Jean Chretien had said Canada would only join military action against Iraq if approved by the UN Security Council. Although under his own government Canada participated in the 1999 NATO assault on Yugoslavia—which was mounted without UN authorization—Chretien claimed that "we in Canada never went to war without the authorization of the United Nations."

The Chretien government's now abandoned insistence on the need for UN Security Council authorization had a double motivation, neither of which had anything to do with the plight of the Iraqi people. Canada's elite fears a unilateral, to say nothing of unprovoked, US war against Iraq will cause a major rift between the US and Europe and shatter the system of multilateral relations and institutions through which it has sought to offset US geopolitical and economic power so as to pursue its own predatory interests. Second, the Liberals recognize that the vast majority of Canadians oppose a US war on Iraq. UN sanction, they calculate, would give US military action a cover of pacific and international legitimacy.

If the Chretien government has now identified itself more closely with the US war drive, even as polls show opposition to war growing, it is because it has become convinced—the public pronouncements of various ministers notwithstanding—that the Bush administration is hell-bent on invading Iraq and that the interests of Canadian capital can be best served by bowing to the inevitable sooner rather than later. Significantly, France, Germany and several other states that previously expressed major reservations about the US

war drive have also in recent days shifted in the direction of supporting all-out war against Iraq.

McCallum refused to answer questions at his January 9 press conference about the size and character of Canada's contribution to a US assault on Iraq. But he was at pains to downplay media reports that Canadian military officials posted to the Central Command had been excluded from British-US war planning meetings. "There was a time," said the defense minister, "when we had not indicated our position at all on Iraq and some planning went on in our absence. But we subsequently indicated we are interested [in joining the attack on Iraq] and the moment we so indicated we were involved in those discussions." McCallum added that Rumsfeld, who along with Vice President Cheney is the leading hawk in the top-levels of the Bush administration, had been "very happy with what I said to him."

McCallum's comments have been derided by much of Canada's political establishment as too little too late. Typical was Tory defense critic Elsie Wayne's claim that Canada's armed forces are too under-funded and under-manned to make any real contribution to a war on Iraq. "What bothers me," said Wayne, "is that Finance Minister John Manley and the prime minister aren't addressing the situation with our defense and the need for money to be put there to give our troops the tools to do the job if there is a war with Iraq or North Korea or wherever." In fact, the Liberals have indicated base military spending will be increased significantly in the forthcoming federal budget.

As for the aforementioned *Globe and Mail*, it has chastised the Liberal government for failing to pledge unconditional support to the US earlier, even while criticizing the Bush administration for not having "made clear why a war against Iraq is necessary." Contrasting the Chretien government's stance unfavorably to that of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, the *Globe* argued Canada can only retain influence with Washington if it recognizes "Canada's interest demands it be allied with the United States": "There's a term in the business world, 'first-mover advantage': act early and win the spoils. For Canada, geopolitical advantage might have come from arriving at [McCallum's] inevitable policy pronouncement some time ago.... Instead the Chretien government offers me-too-ism."

Globe's position reflects the view of ~~The~~ most powerful sections of Canada's corporate elite, which believe that just as Canadian capital had to abandon its traditional national economic policy and enter into a free trade agreement with the US to survive in a new era of global economic competition, so it must forge a new strategic partnership with the US to defend its interests within the new and increasingly unstable global geopolitical order. Yesterday, Thomas D'Aquino, the head of the Canadian Council of Chief executives, initiated a campaign for a joint Canada-US "North American security perimeter."

Canada's military, meanwhile, has increasingly pushed against the bar on criticism of civilian political authorities in its campaign for massive increases in military spending and closer military collaboration with the US. According to a report in the *National Post*, the top brass of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is pushing for the biggest possible Canadian contribution to a US war on Iraq—including ships, fighter planes and a brigade group of up to 3,000 mechanized infantry. The *Post* quotes Colonel Alain Pellerin, a retired CAF officer and executive director of the Conference of Defence Associations, as saying, "The feeling among the army is that this is their last chance to show the country what they can do."



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