

Who's going to be next?

Canada's prime minister denounces US "regime change" policy

Keith Jones
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Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien expressed alarm Friday over the Bush administration's assertion that irrespective of what happens with the United Nations' disarmament process the US will proceed with "regime change" in Iraq.

A visibly agitated Chrétien warned that if the US claims a right to use its military might to overturn governments that it disapproves of, world geopolitics will be thrown into chaos.

Speaking while on a state visit to Mexico, Chrétien declared, "Myself, I think that the consequences can be very grave when we go for a change in regime. When are we going to go elsewhere? Who's going to be next? Give me the list.... This is a very dangerous concept."

UN Security Council Resolution 1441, observed Chrétien, calls only for Iraqi disarmament. "If you read it, it is not talking about a regime change."

Chrétien, whose government has been criticized by the Canadian corporate media and much of the US political establishment for not being sufficiently supportive of Washington, sought to underline the incendiary character of the Bush administration's "regime change" doctrine by making a pointed, if ironic, reference to his own plans to step down as prime minister in February 2004. "I'm OK, I only have 11 months to go. But how about somebody else? So this is a very dangerous concept."

Chrétien has never been known for his intellectual mettle. But as a Liberal cabinet minister he has served in the highest ranks of the Canadian government for most of the past 35 years and has participated in numerous international meetings and negotiations. His remarks are significant because they reveal the anxiety and fear the Bush administration's belligerence is

provoking in the ruling circles of even the US's closest allies.

Whilst Chrétien has been criticized by the ultra-right-wing Canadian Alliance for allowing Britain's Tony Blair to emerge as Bush's closest ally, he and his Liberal government have repeatedly echoed Washington's rhetoric that Saddam Hussein must disarm or be overthrown. He has also endorsed Washington's claim that a second UN resolution is not needed to sanction a US-led invasion if Iraq is not disarming. Even while condemning the US notion of "regime change," Chrétien was careful to reiterate his support for an invasion of Iraq if under the cover of UN Resolution 1441. If Hussein "does not change," said Chrétien "... and if some day he [has] it on the head he will blame nobody but himself."

There is little doubt that Canadian armed forces ships and planes will participate in the coming US invasion of Iraq. Some two dozen top Canadian military personnel have gone to Qatar where they are working with their US and British counterparts on the invasion plans. Canada already has several ships in the Persian Gulf.

What frictions there have been between Ottawa and Washington over Iraq have revolved around the Bush administration's wanton disregard for the system of multilateral institutions and alliances through which the imperialist powers have, for the past half century, sought to manage conflicts amongst themselves and meet any challenge to their domination.

The Canadian government is desperate to find a means of salvaging the old geopolitical order and avoid the marginalization if not outright collapse of NATO, the UN and other multilateral institutions. There are

two reasons for this.

First, because Ottawa fears that Washington's turn to unilateralism and trashing of such traditional concepts of international law as national sovereignty in favor of "preemptive action" and "regime change" will gravely destabilize international relations, spark a new world arms race, and fuel outrage around the world about the imbalance in the division of wealth and geopolitical power.

Second, because multilateralism has long been the Canadian elite's principal strategy for offsetting US economic and geopolitical power. A breach between Europe and the US would further reduce the ability of the Canadian bourgeoisie to independently assert and pursue its own predatory interests.

In a public speech during his Mexico visit, Chrétien made reference to a famous quip by long-time Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau that sharing North America with the US was like a mouse sharing a bed with an elephant. With NAFTA, Chrétien told his Mexican hosts, "Now we're two" [mice.]

It is these considerations and constraints that lie behind the so-called compromise resolution on Iraq that Canada is floating in the corridors of the UN. The ostensible purpose of the resolution is to give more time for the inspections process so as to allow a better determination whether Iraq is complying with resolution 1441. Its real purpose is to provide the great powers with more time in the hopes that they can strike a deal allowing the US to proceed with an invasion of Iraq with UN authorization.

That the Canadian "compromise" is meant to preserve the unity of the UN Security Council by ultimately delivering its endorsement of a US-led invasion of Iraq is underscored by the fact that the resolution provides for only two to three more weeks of inspections than Washington appears willing to countenance. Moreover, the Canadian resolution authorizes military action against Iraq if it is found in noncompliance in even more explicit terms than does the one drafted by the US and Britain.

Mexico and Chile, which unlike Canada currently have seats on the UN Security Council, are promoting the Canadian resolution as a means of squaring Washington's demands that they vote for war with their own publics who are overwhelming hostile. The Bush administration, meanwhile, has dismissed the

Canadian position as "unhelpful."

No doubt Chrétien's remarks were occasioned by his growing realization that Washington is not only running roughshod over its traditional allies in the drive to war. By invoking such pretexts as "regime change" and "preemptive action," the Bush administration is serving notice the conquest of Iraq will not satisfy its appetite. The question truly is, "Who's going to be next?"



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