

Canada: top general spouts rhetoric of Bush administration

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Canada's top military commander, Chief of Defence Staff General Rick Hillier, has been the focus of a blitz of media attention in the wake of a series of bellicose public appearances. Openly adopting the militarist rhetoric of the Bush administration, the general frothed to a media briefing that the targets of an expanded Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) deployment to Afghanistan were "detestable murderers and scumbags" who "detest our freedoms... detest our society... [and] detest our liberties."

The immediate goal of Hillier's bluster is to increase public support for the deployment of CAF personnel outside of the immediate environs of Kabul, the seat of the US puppet regime of Hamid Karzai. Undoubtedly, Hillier's tough talk is also aimed at acclimatizing the Canadian public to the inevitability of war deaths.

In mid-July, 250 soldiers from Edmonton were deployed to the volatile Kandahar region, where resistance to foreign occupation forces has been particularly fierce. In early 2006, a further 1,100 Canadian soldiers will arrive in Kandahar as part of a NATO brigade. The CAF already plays a leading role in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)—the 5,000 man United Nations-mandated, NATO-led military force that props up the Karzai regime. Seven hundred Canadian soldiers are deployed to the capital for this purpose and another 700 soldiers will soon deploy to Kabul in order to bolster the sham general elections scheduled for September 2005.

General Hillier justified the expanded Canadian presence with the absurd assertion that the Afghan resistance to foreign occupation poses a threat to ordinary Canadians. The CAF, he vowed, was "not going to let those radical murderers and killers rob from others and certainly we're not going to let them rob from Canada."

Clearly not much insight will be gained from a careful parsing of the general's sentences. Politically, the most significant thing about Hillier's remarks is not the comments themselves, but rather the extent to which they have received a sympathetic response from the entire Canadian political establishment, including the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP).

The NDP's leader Jack Layton hastened to offer his support to General Hillier, opining that "controlled anger, given what's happened, is an appropriate response" and praised Hillier as "a very committed, level-headed head of our armed forces... who isn't afraid to express the passion that underlies the mission that

front-line personnel are going to be taking on."

Predictably, the conservative *Globe & Mail* celebrated Hillier's spleen, editorializing that the General's "warlike words" were justified by the need to protect Afghanistan's "fragile new democracy" from Al Qaeda and the Taliban, and because the country's "people need help as they try to rebuild their homes and their lives after a quarter-century of civil war and misrule." Tacitly acknowledging the reality that military operations in Afghanistan expose the Canadian population to a heightened risk of terrorist reprisals, the editors continue:

"Could our stepped-up presence make Canada more of a target? Of course it could. Though it's impossible to know the motives of twisted minds like those of the London bombers, it's quite possible they struck there because of Britain's leading role in the Iraq war, just as it's quite possible that terrorists struck Madrid last year because Spanish troops were in Iraq. But then, terrorism has afflicted plenty of other countries, from Indonesia to Turkey to Morocco, that have had nothing to do with Iraq. Let's not forget that the attack that started all this, on 9/11, came before Iraq or Afghanistan."

The *Globe & Mail* editors are no doubt fully aware that the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon only provided a pretext for carrying out long-standing plans for the invasion of Iraq and for an increased US military presence in the strategic region of Central Asia, including Afghanistan. The sophistry employed by the *Globe*—militarism provokes terrorism but is justified anyway because of... terrorism—underlines the extent to which the Canadian ruling class increasingly finds it convenient to use the threat of terrorism in pursuit of its own geo-political interests.

In recent weeks, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Anne McLellan has publicly upbraided the Canadian public for its complacency in the face of the terrorist threat. McLellan told the media that she doesn't "believe that Canadians are as psychologically prepared for a terrorist attack as probably we all should be," and that "we have, perhaps for too long, thought that these are things that happen somewhere else."

McLellan's comments come directly on the heels of the public assertion by Ward Elcock, just retired as head of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), that "it is no longer a question of if, but rather of when and where we will be specifically targeted." According to the *Globe & Mail*, McLellan has specifically asked for the assistance of the media in shaping public

discussion of terrorism “in a way that doesn’t scare Canadians, but informs them and motivates them in a level of understanding that will help them when—God forbid—some bad things happen.”

The threat contained in McLellan’s words should be noted: the government minister responsible for public safety is explicitly promising that the Canadian population will find itself the victim of terrorist attacks. There can be no doubt that elements of the Canadian elite would welcome such an eventuality, as it would rouse Canadians from their supposed “complacency”, i.e., give the government a pretext to increase the powers of the state.

The breadth of elite consensus behind Hillier and his thuggish remarks is no historical accident. The Canadian ruling class is intent that it not be left out of the new “great game” signaled by the assaults on Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq—all aggressive US-led actions which benefited from one or another type of support from the Canadian government.

American imperialism, no longer militarily constrained by the existence of the Soviet Union, is seeking to use its enormous military superiority to offset mounting domestic social and economic crisis by securing control of critical resources and unbridled, world geo-political predominance. The other powers have been left scrambling to develop geo-political and military strategies to counteract a US that no longer abides by the system of international relations and institutions it crafted in the aftermath of World War II and is intent on re-dividing the world in the interests of American capital.

For the Canadian ruling class, the situation brings particularly acute challenges. In the 1960s and 1970s, successive Canadian governments invested heavily in global multilateral institutions as a counterweight to the political clout of the United States. An important component of this strategy was the ideology of a “pacifist” Canada, according to which the predominant role of the Canadian Armed Forces was that of “peacekeeping”. But given the present scramble for resources and geo-political influence, the “peacekeeping” ideology that once served it so well has increasingly come to be seen by Canada’s elite as an encumbrance, if not an albatross.

Since the 1991 Gulf War, the military, the Conservatives and increasingly the Liberals and the rest of the political establishment have sought to recast the CAF’s role as that of “peace-maker”—a force that imposes “peace” through offensive military operations. Not the least significant element in this reorientation has been a concerted attempt to foster national pride in Canada’s role in the two world wars. A recent example of this was the state funeral for World War II veteran Ernest Smokey Smith and the lavish media attention accorded it.

The promotion of Hillier to the country’s top military position and the celebration of his bloodlust reflect a substantial acceleration in this ongoing campaign to refashion the role of Canada’s military. When the *Globe & Mail* and the NDP praise Hillier for “just doing his job” the precise significance of the accolade is this: Hillier’s “job” is to promote the Canadian military as a force for aggressive foreign adventures.

Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin appointed Hillier as Chief of Defence Staff in January 2005, passing over two more senior candidates. Not only did Hillier’s resumé include command

experience in Afghanistan and a term as deputy commander of the US Army’s III Corps based in Fort Hood, Texas; the 49-year old Hillier had a reputation as an outspoken advocate of a “modernized” Canadian Armed Forces, structured around interventions in so-called “failed states” rather than peacekeeping.

The appointment was reportedly made on the recommendation of Defence Minister Bill Graham. An article by *Globe & Mail* columnist Hugh Winsor cites a comment by one of Graham’s “confidants” that, “We expect to see Rick Hillier kick ass around here.”

Hillier has inherited a Canadian Armed Forces which the Martin government has committed to expand by 5,000 regular troops and 3,000 reservists, a commitment estimated to involve an increase in military spending of \$400 million per year. The February 2005 Liberal budget included a \$12.8 billion plan to expand and strengthen the CAF, including provisions for the development of a rapid deployment force for use in international crises.

Every faction of the Canadian political establishment is behind the expansion of Canadian militarism. But this program does not by any means find support among wide layers of the population. On the contrary, outside of big business circles, there is an intense distrust of the Martin government’s championing of the military, its pandering to the Bush administration, and its increasing willingness to play the “terrorism” card.

In a recent Toronto speech, General Hillier explicitly called for closer cooperation between the Canadian Armed Forces and big business, beginning with the present occupation of Afghanistan. According to the *National Post*, Hillier called for a “Team Canada approach,” going on to explain that “we need private industry involved... you want to come in and make money from us, build our camps, fill our contracts and or do our maintenance for us and then 10 years later, when everything’s stabilized and secure, you can come and start operating and prosecute your business.”

Such is the grim future advocated by “Team Canada”, whose members span the official Canadian political spectrum from the Tories to the NDP—a future of decades-long colonial-style wars carried out in the name of “prosecuting business.”



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