

Harper outlines the Canadian elite's imperialist agenda

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23 September 2006

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper used a trip to New York this week to press for even closer economic, military, and geo-political ties between Canada and the US.

The substance of Harper's pitch was that a closer US-Canada partnership is vital for both the realization of the global ambitions of US imperialism and the more modest, but no less mercenary, agenda of Canadian capital.

Speaking Wednesday evening before the Economic Club of New York—a quintessential forum of the US financial and corporate elite—Harper was at pains to demonstrate how

much “Canada has to offer” the US “in facing global challenges” to its position as the world's preeminent economic and military power.

This argument was coupled to a call for the US elite to pay greater heed to Canada's contribution to the buttressing of US power, including by adjusting US policy in accordance with Canadian demands in a handful of areas, and to repeated emphatic assertions of Canada's geo-political importance and determination to be a force in world affairs.

Harper introduced the main body of his address with a question: “Why, ladies and gentlemen, in a turbulent and uncertain world, when our economy and our security are affected by developments in far-off lands, should you focus your attention and your energies on Canada?”

Most of the remainder of Harper's speech was meant to provide an answer, but the crux and tone of his argument was indicated in the next two paragraphs.

“Because Canada is ... a stable and positive force for good,” a state, moreover, that “has much to bring to the table in chaotic and trying times” and that is determined to be “a player” on the world stage.

Harper then highlighted “three things Canada has to offer the US.”

“First, a strong and robust economy and, in particular, an energy industry that is increasingly one of the most important in the world;

“Second, a strong partnership in building both a more competitive and more secure North America;

“And third, a common will to advance, in concert with our

democratic allies, our shared values and interests throughout the world.”

In expanding on Canada's existing and potential role as an economic partner of the US, Harper touted the fact that successive Canadian governments have pursued a neo-liberal agenda of “balanced budgets” and lower corporate and personal taxes, with the result that Canada's corporate tax rate is now lower than the US's.

But he laid special emphasis on Canada's role in providing the US with “energy security”. Canada, observed Harper, is already the US's single most important foreign supplier of oil, natural gas, electricity and uranium, and, due to the oil-rich Alberta tar sands, has the potential to become an even-greater source of energy in the future.

The US, argued Harper, should recognize that it has an “energy superpower” for a neighbor, and that this neighbor shares Wall Street's belief “in free markets and binding contracts.”

Next, Harper argued that if a more “prosperous, competitive” and “secure” North America is to be built and the commercial challenges from a rising China and India and an enlarged European Union are to be met, there will have to be a “continental response” in the form of a closer partnership between Canada, the US, and Mexico.

“At Cancun last spring, President Bush, [Mexican] President Vicente Fox and I took steps to further develop this partnership by focusing on North American competitiveness, energy security, regulatory cooperation, emergency management, and smart and secure borders.”

As proof of Canada's commitment to cooperating with the US in securing the continent, Harper cited the billions Canada has poured into border security and emergency preparedness since the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the recent agreement to expand the Canada-US NORAD air defence pact to include joint policing of North America's coastal waters.

Harper concluded his case that Canada has much to offer Washington and Wall Street by pointing to the important role it is already playing in supporting the Bush

administration in its purported war on terror, including in Afghanistan, touting the billions that Ottawa has recently invested in strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), and by affirming that “Canada’s role in the world will extend beyond this continent.”

“Just as we work together for a more secure and prosperous North America, we need,” said Harper, “to work for a more stable and just world.”

Eager to convince his audience that the Canadian elite is prepared to see its citizens bear the burden of wars aimed at securing the economic and geo-political interests of their Wall Street partners, Harper pointed to the “real casualties” suffered by the CAF in the suppression of the Taliban in southern Afghanistan, and the 120,000 Canadians killed in the two world wars of the last century and the Korean War.

Harper’s speech was largely aimed at convincing the US corporate elite that they have much to gain by a still closer US-Canada partnership and that his Conservative government, as evidenced by the recent deal to end the softwood lumber dispute, is eager to remove any obstacle to such a partnership.

But Canada’s prime minister did raise two objections to current US policy. First, he warned against “poorly thought out or poorly implemented” security measures that could disrupt cross-border commerce and cited as an example a US law that by 2008 would require all Americans and Canadians to have a passport or passport-like document to enter or re-enter the US.

Since September 2001, Canadian big business has been haunted by fear that the strengthening of US borders could seriously erode their “free trade” access to US markets and, with a view to preventing such an outcome, have promoted the notion of a common Canada-US security perimeter.

Harper also used his New York speech to once again voice the Canadian government’s objection to the US’s refusal to recognize Canada’s claim to vast swathes of the Arctic Ocean. These waters are potentially laden with oil and mineral riches. Furthermore, Ottawa is anxious to have its claim over control of the “Northwest Passage” recognized, since global warming risks to transform it into a significant sea-link between Asia and Europe.

Last month, the *National Post*, which has very close ties to the Conservatives, published an editorial that argued that the Harper government should insist, in return for acting as a virtual chorus for the Bush administration’s action on the world stage, that Washington recognize Canada’s claim to the Arctic waters.

Harper couched his complaints about US policy in respectful, even obsequious, terms.

Like a jackal following in the train of a larger beast, Canadian imperialism knows its place. What frustrations it

has at having to bend before its more powerful ally, it vents on the weak and wounded. Hence the celebration in the corporate media of Canada’s participation in a colonial-style counter-insurgency campaign in Afghanistan.

Masses of Canadians are opposed to the Bush administration, which they rightly identify with wars of aggression against the people of Iraq and Afghanistan and with the pursuit of a social-reactionary agenda at home.

But among the corporate establishment there is strong support for the Harper government’s attempt to forge an even closer relationship with US imperialism.

Canada’s newspaper of record, the *Globe and Mail*, titled its lead editorial Friday, “reclaiming Canada’s role as a world player.” It lauded Harper’s speech before the Economic Club of New York and a second speech he gave the next day to the United Nations, which was largely devoted to casting the Canadian intervention to prop up Afghanistan’s US-installed government as a mission for democracy, “as a blessedly coherent vision of Canada’s expanding international role.”

Concluded the *Globe* editorial: “Taken together, the two speeches constitute a realistic approach to a formidable world. There is idealism. [By which they mean the rhetoric about promoting democracy] There is the tough calculation of the bottom line. And there are no doubts that Canadian interests are central. Good.”

The *Ottawa Citizen*’s endorsement of a policy aimed at tying Canada still closer to the US—to a power that has asserted its right to wage illegal “pre-emptive” wars and its determination to prevent any power or coalition of powers emerging that could potentially challenge its global supremacy—was no less emphatic.

“Our country,” declared the *Citizen*, “a global trader, dependent on allies and alliances to secure our security and prosperity at home, needs a policy that is clear-eyed, pragmatic and muscular. ... Mr. Harper is restoring our sense of where we stand in the world, after too many years of indifference.”



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