

Canada joins imperialist assault on Libya

Keith Jones
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Canada's entire political establishment—from the official opposition Liberals through the ostensibly left Bloc Quebecois and trade union-sponsored New Democratic Party—has rallied around the Conservative government's decision to order the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) to wage war on Libya, alongside US, French, and British forces.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper had already received assurances of support from the three opposition party leaders, when he announced last Friday that Canada is deploying 6 F-18 fighters and about 150 CAF support personnel to the Libyan war theater. But in a further demonstration of opposition support, parliament unanimously adopted a resolution Monday affirming its wholehearted endorsement of the imperialist assault on Libya.

Earlier Monday, Defence Minister Peter MacKay announced that Canadian planes have already seen action over the North African country.

Canada has also deployed a naval frigate off Libya's coast, the *HMCS Charlottetown*, and, according to press reports, has had CAF special forces active in the region for at least three weeks. When the *Charlottetown* left for the Mediterranean March 2 with the purported aim of bringing humanitarian aid to Libya, Canadian government spokesmen said they were preparing for all eventualities and that the frigate's mission could change. That change is apparently now underway, with Harper announcing last Saturday that the *Charlottetown* will join a NATO naval blockade of Libya.

Leading off Monday's parliamentary debate on Canada's support for the imperialist attack on Libya, Defence Minister MacKay said Canada has a "moral duty" to intervene to assist the Libyan people and uphold the United Nations and international law.

All of the opposition parties have repeated and amplified these lies.

Canada's participation in the military attack on Libya, alongside US imperialism and the region's old dominant colonial powers, France and Great Britain, has nothing to do with aiding the Libyan people. Rather it is aimed at securing control over the country's oil resources and reasserting the

hegemony of the US and its allies over a region that has been convulsed by popular uprisings against a reactionary and autocratic US-imposed social and political order.

While Canada's ruling elite now claims to be outraged by the bloody repression meted out by Gaddafi's regime, the Canadian government and premier Canadian companies like Suncor and SNC-Lavalin were more than happy to do business with the dictator.

For decades Canada has joined with the US and the European great powers in sustaining a string of autocratic regimes in North Africa and the Middle East, from Morocco to Saudi Arabia, while supporting Israel in its dispossession and repression of the Palestinian people.

Insofar as the opposition parties have criticized the Conservative government's position on Libya, it is has been from the standpoint that Canada should have been more public and aggressive in promoting military action.

Canada's social democratic party, the New Democratic Party (NDP) issued a statement on February 22 calling for the UN Security Council, that is for the great powers, to establish a no-fly zone over Libya and continued to repeat this demand even as top US officials spelled out clearly that a no-fly zone was commensurate with war. The NDP's demand has now been realized and with the social democrats' blessing in the only form that it could have ever been realized by the UN, which is an imperialist-dominated nest of geopolitical intrigue or, as Lenin said in speaking of its predecessor the League of Nations, "a thieves kitchen."

In welcoming Canada's participation in the war on Libya, Liberal foreign affairs critic Bob Rae brushed aside suggestions that the Liberals' support for the CAF deployment could undermine their oppositional stance in the run-up to a series of parliamentary non-confidence votes this week and next. "We don't see this as a partisan issue between Liberals and Conservatives," said Rae. "The fact that Mr. Harper has finally agreed to participate [in military action] doesn't change the way we will be proceeding over the next week."

In reality Harper—in keeping with his frequent statements of concern over the past two months at the threat the popular uprising in Egypt represents to "stability"—did, from all

reports, throw Canada's limited weight behind the calls from France's Nicolas Sarkozy and Britain's David Cameron for military intervention. But he chose to do so only behind closed doors so as not to damage the Canadian ruling class' most important bilateral relationship—its partnership with US imperialism.

As underscored by the Harper government's recent offer to forge an even closer strategic relationship with Washington in the form of a "continental security perimeter," Canada's ruling elite calculates that under conditions of world economic crisis and a fluid geopolitical order characterized by the rise of new powers, its partnership with the US is more vital than ever.

Once the Obama administration decided for war, fashioning a UN resolution that in fact authorized military action far beyond a simple no-fly zone, Harper lost no time in flying his war colors. He hastened to Paris to participate in the summit meeting that Sarkozy convened Saturday to support and plot the military campaign. While there Harper had bilateral meetings with both the French president and the British prime minister.

At the summit's conclusion, Harper made a series of bellicose statements, promising that Canada will be in the thick of the military action.

While Obama and some other leaders, in an attempt to maintain a cloak of UN legality for the military offensive, have tried to claim that the object of the war is not "regime change," Harper has made no such distinction. Gaddafi, said Harper, "will not last very long." He then added, "I think that is the basis on which we're moving forward. If I am being frank here, that is probably more understood than spoken aloud. But I just said it aloud."

Harper, like other leaders of the anti-Libya war coalition, has to this point been careful to say that the Canadian intervention in Libya will not involve the deployment of combat troops, for fear of provoking an international outcry.

But Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon went on record last Friday as saying that Canada is "open to all options" for pacifying Libya, including "boots on the ground." He pointedly observed that under the UN Security Council resolution drafted by Washington, Paris and London, troops could be sent into Libya if they were deployed "to protect citizens," and not designated an occupation force. "That's what the resolution calls for," said Cannon.

The unanimity in parliament is mirrored by the full-throated support for the war voiced by the editorial boards of the country's major corporate dailies.

The *Globe and Mail*, Canada's so-called newspaper of record, has been campaigning for the imposition of a "no-fly zone" for weeks, urging, if necessary, the establishment of a

George W. Bush-style "coalition of the willing" in defiance of the UN.

In an editorial entitled, "'Free Libya' gets a lifeline," the liberal *Toronto Star* said Harper "had made the right call" in ordering the CAF into action in Libya.

The *National Post*, a neoconservative paper with privileged links to the Harper government, made clear that it conceives of the attack on Libya as a stepping-stone to a larger war—military action against Iran. "If we cannot even rouse ourselves to confront a tinpot dictator such as Gaddafi," asked the *Post*, "what credibility do we have in regards to an emerging regional power such as Iran?"

The Canadian bourgeoisie, no less than its rivals, is turning toward imperialist war as a means of staking its claim to natural resources, markets and strategic influence under conditions where the post-World War II capitalist order founded on the unchallenged economic domination of the US and its dollar has collapsed.

With but one exception, Canada has played a major part in every major military action launched by Washington since the end of the Cold War—including the 1991 Gulf War, the 1993 incursion into Somalia, the 1999 NATO war on Yugoslavia and the ongoing invasion and occupation of Afghanistan.

The one exception is the 2003 invasion of Iraq. What is little known is that up to the eleventh hour Canada was actively involved in the US-British war preparations and, as the then-US Ambassador to Canada Paul Cellucci conceded, Canada subsequently provided much more support to the war than did many of the members of "the coalition of the willing."

And as a consequence of these wars and a massive rearmament campaign, Canada's military spending has dramatically increased since the end of the 1990s under Liberal and Conservative governments alike. Indeed, according to a report published at the beginning of this month by the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives, the Canadian government will spend at least \$22.3 billion on the military in the 2010-11 fiscal year. This is more in real, i.e. inflation-adjusted dollars, than Ottawa has spent on the military in any year since the end of World War II.



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