

Canada to expand its role in imperialist assault on Libya

Keith Jones
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Canada's Conservative government has announced that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) will continue to play a leading role in the imperialist assault on Libya well beyond the middle of this month.

In March, all four parties in Canada's parliament, as well as the Green Party, which subsequently elected its first-ever MP, supported a government motion authorizing the CAF to deploy its forces against the oil-rich North African country for the next 90 days.

Canada has since emerged as one of the principal belligerents. By the end of May, the seven CF-18 fighter jets that the CAF has deployed to the Libyan theater had flown 324 attack missions and dropped 240 laser-guided bombs. Only the US, French, and British militaries have mounted more air sorties over, and bombing raids on, Libya.

Canada has also deployed a naval frigate off Libya's shore that is enforcing an arms blockade of Tripoli and other Libyan ports. Members of Canada's elite special operations unit, Joint Task Force-2, have reportedly been active in Libya since even before parliament formally approved the Libyan intervention and a Canadian general, Lieutenant-General Charles Bouchard, has been charged by NATO with directing the campaign to oust the Gaddafi regime and replace it with one even more subservient to western interests.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper first announced that his government will seek parliamentary authorization to extend the CAF's participation in the Libyan war beyond the 90-day limit while attending the G-8 summit in France.

In what was his first foreign trip since winning a parliamentary majority in the May 2 federal election, Harper went out of his way to demonstrate that his government will be a fount of war and reaction on the world stage.

So as to bolster Israel's diplomatic position, Harper reportedly prevented the G-8 summit communiqué from including explicit support for US President Obama's call for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the pre-1967 borders. The Israeli press claimed that Harper vetoed mention of the pre-1967 borders at the urging of Israeli Prime Minister and Zionist hardliner Benjamin Netanyahu. Harper's aides responded by insisting that Canada's prime minister has been a strong advocate for Israel for years, effectively conceding that he had coordinated his stand at the G-8 summit with Israel's government.

Following the summit, Harper flew to Athens where he strongly supported the anti-working class austerity measures that are being implemented by the country's PASOK government so as to satisfy the world's major banks and other international investors.

"I," said Harper, "certainly admire the determination of Prime Minister Papandreou, and the very difficult actions he's had to undertake in response to problems his government did not create. So we are very much all on his side."

From Greece, Harper traveled to Afghanistan, where he hailed the CAF's decade-long role in the Afghan invasion and counterinsurgency war. Canada's prime minister touted the CAF intervention and the Afghan war as a resounding success.

In fact, the war—whose roots lie in the US's use of Afghanistan as a Cold War killing field—has proven to be an unmitigated disaster for the people of Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan, resulting in untold Afghan and Pakistani fatalities and uprooting millions from their homes.

Even from the standpoint of Washington and its NATO allies, the war has not paid the expected dividends. The US-installed regime of Hamid Karzai is

widely despised by the Afghan people and can only survive through a massive and costly US-NATO presence.

If Harper is nonetheless so unequivocal in lauding the CAF's intervention in Afghanistan, it is because he and Canada's political and financial elite view it as a decisive turning point in reviving the CAF as a major instrument of Canadian foreign policy and in acclimatizing the Canadian population to the country's participation in wars around the globe. Indeed, no sooner had Harper returned to Canada than it was revealed that the CAF is currently seeking to establish a network of seven military bases—including in East Asia, the Persian Gulf, east and west Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean—so as to facilitate the rapid deployment of the CAF in future wars.

Canada's military spending is now in real, inflation adjusted terms the highest it has been since the end of World War II. Yet no party, not even the ostensibly "left-wing" NDP, called for cuts to the military budget in the campaign for the May 2 federal election.

To date the Conservatives have provided no details about their parliamentary motion extending the CAF's leading role in the Libya war, except to say that it will be tabled in the coming days.

The NDP, which was catapulted into the Official Opposition as a result of a more than 10-percentage point increase in its share of the popular vote on May 2, has, for its part, refused to indicate its attitude to Canada's continued participation in the war on Libya.

In response to Harper's announcement, NDP foreign affairs critic Paul Dewar was quick to point out that the NDP had joined with all the other parties in authorizing the CAF's intervention in Libya. But Dewar added that the mission's purpose needs to be clarified, since the NATO powers "appear" to have strayed beyond the original UN resolution authorizing a "humanitarian" intervention and to be seeking to overthrow the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. Said Dewar, "We'll have to examine this closely before we decide whether to support" an extension.

Dewar notwithstanding, from the very get-go the claims made by Canada and the other western powers to be intervening in Libya to save civilian lives were a cynical pretense. It was invoked so as to justify intervening in a country that is not just rich in oil, but

that borders Egypt and Tunisia, countries where popular uprisings had just unseated decades-old western-backed dictatorships.

While Dewar claims that it is still unclear if NATO and the Harper government are seeking "regime change" in Libya, western leaders, including Canada's Prime Minister, have for weeks been declaring that there will be no end to the bombing of Libya cities until Gaddafi is forced from power. And NATO forces, acting under the command of the Canadian Bouchard, have repeatedly targeted Gaddafi and his family.

The NDP's March vote in support of the CAF deployment against Libya was only the latest occasion in which Canada's social-democratic party has facilitated imperialist war. The NDP supported the 1999 NATO bombing campaign against Yugoslavia, calling for an end to the bombing only a few days before NATO itself halted the slaughter. The NDP also long supported Canada's participation in the Afghan War, including the leading role the CAF played in the counter-insurgency war in Kandahar Province, a Taliban stronghold. Even after officially calling for Canada to withdraw all combat troops from Afghanistan, the NDP reversed itself in December 2008 and agreed to serve in a Liberal-led coalition government committed to waging war in Afghanistan through 2011.

Whatever stand the NDP ultimately takes on the Conservatives' new motion on Libya, it has once again shown itself to be a party *of* and *for* big business—a party that can no more serve as an instrument to oppose the predatory interests of the Canadian ruling elite abroad than it can serve as a means of resisting the ruling class assault on worker living standards, public services, and democratic rights at home.



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