

Canada's military to establish base in Kuwait in push for global presence

Graham Beverley
14 July 2011

Canada's Conservative government announced Monday that it has entered into an agreement with Kuwait to establish a new staging base for Canadian military operations in the Middle East and Central Asia. The military base in Kuwait is part of a larger Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF) endeavor to establish forward bases in East Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean, to allow for the rapid deployment of military force in pursuit of Canada's imperialist interests around the world.

Defense Minister Peter MacKay signed the memorandum of understanding that secured the new base during a two-day trip to the Persian Gulf sheikdom. "This is about improving our flexibility, and yes, our reach, our capacity to do more, and to respond in times of crises and to contribute internationally," MacKay told reporters. "But this is not about building big logistical bases around the globe."

He added, "It's a light footprint that allows us to refuel, to maintain and to forward on equipment. ... We're in discussions with a few countries, but [Kuwait] is the focus right now because of Afghanistan." The agreement establishing the Kuwait base gives Canada access to a military and civilian port, a military airfield, a civilian airport, and a large barracks in the strategically located country.

The Kuwait base is viewed as important for supporting Canada's continued military presence in Afghanistan. This month the CAF turned over to the US military its remaining responsibilities for waging counter-insurgency war in the southern Afghan province of Kandahar, bringing to an end a six year-long deployment. But with the support of the Canadian bourgeoisie's two traditional parties of government, the Liberals and Conservatives, the CAF has already embarked on a further three-year Afghan mission, which will see some one thousand Canadian soldiers deployed to Kabul and other centers to train Afghan National Army officers in counter-insurgency warfare.

For much of the past decade, the CAF used a secret base in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), "Camp Mirage," to provide logistical support to the CAF in Afghanistan. But last year, the UAE abruptly closed the CAF base after a dispute with Ottawa over increased Canadian landing rights for UAE government-owned Emirates Airlines.

Undoubtedly the Afghan mission is an important factor in Ottawa's decision to follow the US, far and away Canada's most important military-strategic ally, in establishing a military presence in Kuwait. But Afghanistan is hardly the only consideration—as attested by the CAF's quest for bases around the world.

The Gulf sheikdom, which was carved out by the British at the end of the First World War and allied with the US in the decades after World War II, owes its creation and existence to the importance of its geo-strategic position. Kuwait borders Iraq and Saudi Arabia and lies only a short distance from Iran. In other words, it has the potential to serve as the launching pad for military operations against Iran or in defense of the US-backed regimes throughout the Middle East.

According to an article in the French-language daily *Le Devoir*, the Canadian government made use of a military cooperation agreement with

Kuwait that dates back to the 1991 Gulf War—when Canada joined a US-led coalition in restoring the Kuwaiti royal family to power—to press for the right to establish a CAF base on part of a US military facility. Speaking to reporters after the announcement on Monday, McKay said, "Canada proudly deployed over 4,000 Canadian Forces personnel to the campaign to liberate Kuwait during the 1991 Gulf War and our friendship has grown stronger over the past twenty years."

The CAF has given the name Operational Support Hubs Network to its plan to establish a worldwide presence—a project which according to the *Devoir* article is "already well-advanced."

The plan calls for two types of foreign bases. The first will be manned by Canadian troops; the second will serve either to warehouse material and communications systems that can be activated at short notice in the event of a rapid deployment of Canadian military forces or to provide a guarantee of access to a base in the region should the Canadian government see fit to deploy military force.

Canadian imperialism extends its reach around the globe

In addition to the base in Kuwait, the Department of National Defense announced at the beginning of June that the CAF has already reached agreements to open military bases in Germany and Jamaica. The CAF has also indicated its interest in pursuing bases in Senegal in West Africa, Kenya or Tanzania in East Africa, South Korea, and Singapore.

Situated in countries of critical geo-strategic importance, the "Support Hubs" will serve as "trampolines" for deploying troops and material in future CAF missions.

In confirming the CAF's intention to set in place the Support Hub Network, Lieutenant John Nethercott underscored that Canada's military is seeking to develop the capacity to rapidly intervene around the world. The CAF, he said, "doesn't have a crystal ball" as to where it will be called upon to take action.

Accordingly, the CAF plans to locate military bases at geo-political flashpoints and areas of importance for Canadian imperialism

Lieutenant-Colonel Damien Boyle, the director of Canadian operations at the base in Germany which supplies the 500-strong Canadian force currently involved in the assault on Libya, told the *Devoir* that "Canada is not seeking an imperial presence," but "a means of responding rapidly" to world events.

But the Libyan operation testifies to the imperialist motivations at the root of the plans to establish CAF capabilities around the world. Spearheaded by France and Britain, but ultimately dependent on Washington's military might, the imperialist intervention in Libya was initially promoted as a "humanitarian intervention" aimed at preventing the embattled Gaddafi regime from massacring its political opponents. But

it is now more or less openly conceded by NATO and NATO heads of government that the objective of the assault on Libya is “regime change,” the installation of a pliant regime composed of longtime CIA-backed Libyan exiles, Islamacists, and recent high-level defectors from the Libyan government.

Canada has taken a prominent role in the assault on Libya, bombing targets, gathering intelligence, and enforcing a naval blockade. A CAF general, Lt.-General Charles Bouchard, is in overall command of the NATO war campaign.

The staging point established in Jamaica gives the CAF increased access to the Caribbean and the countries of Latin America, where Canadian mining companies (such as Barrick Gold and Goldcorp) own significant natural resources and Canadian manufacturers (such as Gildan Active-wear and Methanex) exploit low-wage labour. Already the CAF’s Jamaican military base has served to support the CAF intervention in Haiti, undertaken to “maintain security” after last year’s devastating earthquake. Previously, the Canadian military served as part of the US-led occupation force that sought to “stabilize” Haiti, i.e. protect imperialist interests, in 1993 and 2004, after right-wing military coups had thrown Haiti into political chaos.

The prospective military base sought by the CAF in South Korea would provide a strategic launching pad for any Canadian mission in East Asia. Canadian imperialism has a long and sordid history on the Korean Peninsula, having sent over 25,000 soldiers, the third largest contingent behind the United States and Great Britain, to fight in the Korean War. As a junior partner to US imperialism, Canada’s establishment of a base in South Korea would allow the CAF to contribute to the defense of US-backed regimes in East Asia and the containment of its primary geo-political rival, China.

The other Asian military base sought by the CAF, in US-allied Singapore, would establish a Canadian military presence at an incredibly significant strategic choke-point, the Straits of Malacca. The primary means by which ships pass between the Indian and the Pacific Oceans, the Straits are a trade route of critical importance to the economies of China, South Korea, and Japan. Approximately one quarter of all oil transported by ship, 15 million barrels a day, goes through the Straits of Malacca—from the resource rich powers of the Persian Gulf to the rapidly developing economies of East Asia. The Straits narrow to a width of only three kilometers off of the southern coast of Singapore, providing a potential means to cut off trade to and from the East Asian powers. This ability is jealously guarded by the US and it is in support of any such effort that Canada now seeks to establish a CAF base in Singapore.

Canada’s ruling elite embrace militarism

The plan to establish the “Operational Support Hubs Network” demonstrates the long-term character of the Canadian bourgeoisie’s embrace of military aggression in pursuit of its interests abroad. No longer content to hide its imperialism behind the false face of “peacekeeping,” Canada’s capitalist elite vigorously supported the increasingly militaristic foreign policies of the Chretien-Martin Liberal and the Harper Conservative governments. The CAF’s budget is in real terms at its highest point since the Second World War. That Canada now seeks to build military bases in strategic locations around the world underscores that the missions in Afghanistan and Libya are only the beginning of an outburst of imperialist aggression.

In a recently leaked Department of National Defense report entitled “Army 2040: First Look,” CAF analysts warn of the potential for a violent

international conflagration erupting from the struggle for natural resources, including water and fuel. “There can be little doubt that unrestricted access to reliable energy supplies is a global strategic issue, one for which, recently, numerous nations have been willing to fight, and have indeed done so,” says the report. “Thus the trend that envisions depletion of fossil fuels such as crude oil in coming decades also may contribute to international tensions if not violent conflict.” The report recommends that, in order to protect Canada’s national interests, the CAF must become more “flexible” and “versatile,” attributes pursued in the plan to establish a global network of military bases.

All the parties of Canada’s political establishment have supported and facilitated this recent turn to imperialist aggression. The Liberal Party, which launched Canada’s participation in the 1999 bombing of Yugoslavia and the occupation of Afghanistan, has been instrumental in advancing the doctrine of the “right to protect”, a “humanitarian” repackaging of time-worn justifications for military intervention by imperialist powers.

The New Democratic Party (NDP), Canada’s social democratic party and the newly-minted Official Opposition, on occasion postures as an “antiwar” party; however, the NDP has repeatedly facilitated and supported the CAF’s deployment in imperialist war. The NDP supported the NATO assault on Yugoslavia and Canada’s assumption of a leading role in the counter-insurgency war in southern Afghanistan. Later it reversed course and claimed to support the “immediate” withdrawal of all Canadian combat troops from Afghanistan. But in December 2008, the NDP signed a coalition agreement with the then Official Opposition Liberals that committed them to serving in a government pledged to continue the Afghan combat mission until its completion.

In the parliamentary votes to authorize and extend Canada’s participation in the war in Libya, the NDP caucus voted unanimously with the Conservative government. In a transparent charade meant to deceive the Canadian working class, the NDP claimed last month to have extracted a promise from the Harper government that Canada’s military aims do not include “regime change”—while simultaneously calling upon the government to recognize the US-backed Transitional National Council as the legitimate representative of the Libyan people.

The NDP’s call for a greater “diplomatic” and “humanitarian” contribution to Canada’s war effort is a signal to the ruling elite that the social democrats are willing and able to prosecute the same imperialist agenda as the Harper Conservatives, but with a “softer” face.

Harper says Canada must prepare for a great-power clash

In an extensive interview published by *Maclean’s* magazine last week, Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper outlined his bellicose conception of Canada’s foreign policy. He began by emphasizing the need for Canada’s government to champion the “national interest,” implicitly criticizing his Liberal predecessors for putting too much stock in diplomacy and multilateralism. “I’m not saying,” said Harper, “it is not necessary to have good relations with a lot of people; in fact, having good relations, first and foremost, with our most critical ally, the United States, is essential to Canada’s well-being... But it isn’t enough, in this day and age, to say we get along with people. We have to have a clear sense of where we want to be and where we would like our partners to go in the various challenges that are in front of them.”

Harper then tied this aggressive pursuit of national interest to the need for a well-equipped and battle-tested military. “We’ve received some criticism for re-investing in our military,” conceded Canada’s prime minister, “but when you’re in a dangerous world and countries are from

time to time called upon to do things to deal with those dangers, if you don't have the capacity to act you are not taken seriously... Canada's been at its most influential when it's actually had a range of capabilities... and when it's been using them. If capabilities are just in the freezer all the time then they're not really capabilities, right?"

While the rearmament of the CAF was begun under the Liberal government of Paul Martin, Harper has gone out of his way to repudiate and disparage the officially-promoted myth of Canada as a "peacekeeper" and to revive a bellicose Canadian nationalism. The *Maclean's* interviewer noted that Harper had recently described Canada as a "warrior" nation and the prime minister was quick to reassert this claim, proclaiming Canada as "*the courageous warrior, compassionate neighbour, confident partner.*"

Glorifying Canada's military history as a component of the British Empire, as an ally of "democratic" imperialism in the Second World War, and as a Cold War belligerent, Harper argued that the military and war have been at the center of the fashioning of Canada and Canadian identity since the country's beginning. "I'm not," he added, "dismissing peacekeeping, and I'm not dismissing foreign aid...but the real defining moments for the country and for the world are those big conflicts where everything's at stake and where you take a side and show you can contribute to the right side."

When asked whether Canada was heading towards a similar such "big conflict," Harper responded with a blunt characterization of international relations in the epoch of imperialism, "I think we always are."

"We also know," he continued, that "...the world is becoming more complex, and the ability of our most important allies, and most importantly the United States, to single-handedly shape outcomes and protect our interests, has been diminishing, and so I'm saying we have to be prepared to contribute more, and that is what this government's been doing."



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact