

Harper to escalate Canadian military intervention in Iraq

Félix Gauthier
27 August 2014

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper has seized on last week's release of a video showing the gruesome beheading of American journalist James Foley by Islamacist insurgents as a pretext for a further expansion of Canada's military intervention in Iraq and the broader region of the Middle East and North Africa.

"We have been in ongoing contact with our principal allies," Harper told a press conference in the Yukon last Thursday, "and we will be announcing some additional steps that we will be able to take with them in the days ahead."

Canada's Conservative government has already voiced its strong support for US air strikes in Iraq, as well as the dispatch of US Special Forces and military trainers to the war-torn country. And on August 15, Canada announced that it is deploying 30 Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) personnel and two transport aircraft—a CC-117 Globemaster and a CC-1303 Hercules—to deliver arms and other military supplies to Kurdish militia in northern Iraq. The supplies are to be donated by the US, France and other countries.

Backed by US air strikes, the Kurdish *Peshmerga* are fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), an Islamacist group that Washington, and its Saudi and Qatari allies have used as proxies in their drive to overthrow Syria's secular Baathist regime, but whose recent spread into Iraq is opposed by the US.

At last week's press conference, Harper made a telling comparison between contemporary Iraq and Afghanistan at the beginning of the 21st century—telling because Canada played a leading role in the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan for 13 years, from 2001 to the spring of this year.

Declaring that "an unrecognized terrorist state" now occupies "a large territory from Aleppo to Baghdad," Harper then added, "This is not unlike what we had in

2002 with the Taliban. You essentially had a terrorist organization establishing a form of governance and using the territory as a training ground for terrorists."

In remarks laden with hypocrisy and cynicism, Canada's prime minister went on to deplore the "really unspeakable barbarism" of ISIS, going so far as to accuse it of "genocide."

Of course Harper made no mention of the fact that the US, Canada and the other western powers have repeatedly employed extreme Islamacists as their proxies in wars for regime change, including in Syria, Libya and Afghanistan. Nor of the social devastation brought about by the US's illegal 2003 invasion of Iraq and of Washington's manipulation of sectarian divisions in Iraq during its subsequent bloody campaign to "pacify" the country.

Yet without all this ISIS would never have emerged, let also as a significant force.

The Conservative government's decision to deploy Canada's military in support of Washington's predatory scheming in Iraq represents a further deepening of Canadian imperialism's strategic partnership with Washington in the Middle East and North Africa—a partnership aimed at maintaining US military-strategic hegemony over this oil-rich region.

Much was made of the fact that in March 2003, Canada's then Liberal government chose at the eleventh hour to withdraw from participation in the illegal US-British invasion of Iraq, a crime justified on the basis of phony trumped-up claims of "weapons of mass destruction." But a diplomatic cable leaked in 2011 revealed that Canada, despite its public posture of opposing a war not sanctioned by the UN, had given the Bush administration private assurances that it could be counted on to provide clandestine support for the Iraq war.

Canada's contribution included the offer of support from two warships deployed in the Persian Gulf, active participation in the Pentagon's pre-war planning, and participation in the invasion of Iraq by "embedded" CAF personnel. Among the CAF personnel, seconded to the US military during the Iraq War, was General Walter Natynczyk, who served as deputy commander of 35,000 US and allied troops during the invasion. Natynczyk was later appointed Canada's Chief of Defence Staff.

As Paul Cellucci, the US ambassador to Canada in 2003 stated, Canada did far more in support of the US invasion of Iraq than many members of Bush's war coalition.

Moreover, the Martin Liberal government's 2004 decision to have the CAF assume charge of the counter-insurgency war in Afghanistan's Kandahar province, the heart of the opposition to the US occupation, was a favor to Washington so as to allow the Pentagon to transfer more troops to Iraq to contend with the mounting anti-US insurgency there.

With the exception of the Iraq War, Canada has played a significant and very public supporting role in every US-led war since the 1991 Gulf War as well as several other US military interventions. These include the 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia and the 2004 ouster of Haiti's elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Canada also played a leading role in NATO's 2011 regime change war in Libya, flying 10 percent of all NATO bombing missions.

The Harper government has strongly supported the threats of US military action against Iran and Canada's entire political establishment has backed the Israeli state's current war on the Palestinian people in Gaza.

Similarly, the Liberals and NDP have strongly supported the Harper government's provocative stance on the Ukraine, including its endorsement of last February's fascist-spearheaded coup in Kyiv and the CAF's participation in the "forward" deployment of NATO forces on Russia's borders.

The Canadian ruling elite has concluded that it can defend its predatory interests on the world stage only by partnering still more closely with the US and accepting a major role in its drive to maintain global hegemony through rearmament, aggression and war.

Harper, in a recent speech at the Canadian War

Museum marking the outbreak of World War I, celebrated Canada's participation in that slaughter as marking Canada's emergence as an imperialist power. "We must never forget," declared Canada's prime minister, "that our place at the table" of "great nations" was not given to us," but "won" on the battlefields of Europe. (See: "Canada's Harper marks World War I with bellicose address")



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