

Canada signs up for Washington's new Mideast war

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With the full support of the country's ruling business elite, Canada has joined the new "coalition of the willing" that US imperialism has organized to wage war in Iraq, Syria and beyond.

Launched in the name of degrading and defeating ISIS (the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria), this war is the continuation and expansion of the wars the US has waged over the past quarter-century in the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa. Its predatory aim is to secure unfettered US strategic hegemony over the Middle East, far and away the world's most important oil-exporting region.

Specifically, it is aimed at propping up the US client regime that was installed in Baghdad as a result of the illegal 2003 invasion of Iraq and at intensifying the US campaign for "regime change" in Syria.

US President Barack Obama announced Wednesday evening that the US will now intervene directly in the war in Syria—initially with air strikes—and step up its efforts to arm, train, and logistically support the insurgency the US and its allies, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar, have fomented in Syria.

At a parliamentary hearing Tuesday, Canada's Conservative government admitted that Canadian Armed Forces' special forces are already on the ground in northern Iraq.

These are the first of what the government has said will be a deployment of up to one hundred members of the Canadian Special Operations Regiment tasked with providing training to the *Peshmerga*—Kurdish militia forces that are currently allied with the government in Baghdad.

The government says that their deployment is currently limited to 30 days. But even much of the pro-war corporate media dismissed this as a transparent ruse, put forward by Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his government so as to give themselves more time to prepare the public for Canada playing a much longer and larger role in Washington's new Mideast war.

Harper and his top ministers have repeatedly said that the government is in ongoing discussions with the US and other allies about Canada's role in the war coalition. In his appearance before the House of Commons' Foreign Affairs Committee, Defence Minister Rob Nicholson described the

dispatch of Canadian special forces to Iraq as an "initial" deployment.

There is increasing public discussion about the possibility Canada will deploy some of its fleet of CF-18 fighter jets. Canada's air force has a long history of close collaboration with the Pentagon, playing a major role in both the 1999 air war against Yugoslavia and the 2011 "regime change" war in Libya.

On Thursday, Liberal leader Justin Trudeau said his party, which has already endorsed the Harper government's deployment of special forces to Iraq, is willing to consider supporting Canadian fighter jets participating in the air war in Iraq, if the government recommends it.

Since mid-August two Royal Canadian Air Force transport planes have been ferrying military supplies to Iraq.

In response to a question at the Foreign Relations Committee hearing about what exactly the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) could teach the experienced fighters of the *Peshmerga*, CAF head General Thomas Lawson boasted about the battlefield experience Canada's military gained from its more than decade-long frontline role in the Afghan War. "What we've got the luxury of here in Canada," declared Lawson, "is having ... [been] battle tested in ways in Afghanistan that have provided us a tremendous ability to advise and assist. And it is that very thing the *Peshmerga* seek from Western allies now."

Harper, Nicholson, and External Affairs Minister John Baird have sought to justify Canada's military intervention in Iraq with lurid denunciations of ISIS, seeking to exploit popular revulsion over the recent videotaped executions of two kidnapped US journalists and ISIS's sectarian violence. Baird declared the struggle against Islamicist terrorism the "greatest struggle of our generation," while Nicholson denounced ISIS as "a real and growing threat to civilization itself."

Such language has been employed time and again by the US and Canadian governments and corporate media since George W. Bush seized on the September 2001 attacks to declare a "war on terror"—employed to justify wars of aggression abroad and massive attacks on democratic rights at home, including the criminalization of dissent and state spying on electronic communications.

Truth, as the saying goes, is the first casualty of war. But in

the case of Iraq and Syria the claims that the US and Canada are intervening for humanitarian reasons and to oppose terrorism are especially obscene.

Were it not for the predatory actions of US imperialism—aided and abetted by Canada—there would be no ISIS in Iraq or Syria. The illegal 2003 US-British invasion of Iraq resulted in the deaths of as many as a million people and tore apart the country's social fabric. Facing resistance, the US openly fanned ethnic and religious-sectarian divides. In Syria, seeking to reprise the stratagem it used in Libya in 2011 to topple the Gaddafi regime, the US and its allies armed Islamicists, including those who were later to form ISIS.

Of course, discussion of what imperialism has wrought in the Middle East is all but completely blacked out in the media.

As for the social-democratic NDP, it is once again helping dress up a Canadian military intervention in “humanitarian” garb, just as it did Canada's participation in the US-led wars against Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Libya. In a show of “cross-party solidarity” for western efforts to prop up Iraq's government and the US anti-ISIS war, NDP foreign affairs critic Paul Dewar accompanied his Liberal counterpart, Marc Garneau, and Baird on a two-day visit to Baghdad and Ebril, the capital of Iraq's Kurdistan Region, last week.

The NDP claims not to have yet made up its mind on whether to explicitly endorse the dispatch of CAF special forces to Iraq, saying it wants further information and a full parliamentary debate.

This is a charade. The NDP has no significant or principled objection to Canada's role as a junior partner of US imperialism in the Middle East. It simply fears being identified with an action that is widely understood to be an extension of the Iraq War. Moreover, the NDP has already been stung by widespread criticism for the full-throated support that this ostensibly “left wing” party gave to the recent Israeli war on the Palestinian population in Gaza.

No one should give any credence to the Harper government's pledges that the CAF will not be involved in a “combat mission” in Iraq, or that Canada will not join US military action against Syria.

Canada's ruling elite long ago concluded that to defend and assert their own imperialist interests on the global stage, they must ally still more closely with the US and play a frontline role in its efforts to offset the relative decline in its economic might by using its military to reassert global hegemony.

The current offensive against ISIS is only the latest stage in an ongoing US-led war for strategic dominance of the Middle East—a war that already embroils Iraq and Syria and could rapidly become a regional war or even a conflict involving the great powers.

The closest allies of Syria's Baathist regime are Iran and Russia. During the past decade the US has repeatedly threatened Iran with war over trumped up and unsubstantiated claims that the Islamic Republic is developing nuclear

weapons. Against Russia, the western powers, with Canada and the Harper government playing an especially provocative role, have been mounting an escalating campaign of sanctions and military threats ever since Moscow pushed back against the US and German-instigated coup against Ukraine's elected President.

Significantly, at this week's foreign affairs committee hearing, Baird denounced Iran in the strongest terms, labelling it “the biggest state sponsor of terrorism in the world,” and claiming it has had “a very destabilizing influence in just about every single country” in the region.

Canada's military has long been engaged in war planning against Syria and Iran. Last April, the *Ottawa Citizen* reported that internal National Defence Department documents show that it has drawn up documents for “at least five scenarios” in which the CAF “could become involved in Syria's ongoing civil war.”

Canada is again going to war because the Canadian ruling class calculates that it must do so to uphold and strengthen its partnership with Washington. However, being a major player in global finance and the oil and natural gas sectors, it is also determined to stake a claim to a “seat at the table” in the reordering of the Middle East. Canadian companies have almost a billion dollars' worth of assets in Iraq and are especially active in the northern, predominantly Kurdish, part of the country where Canadian special forces have been deployed.

There is little support among the Canadian people, especially the working class, for the aggressive, militarist program of the ruling class. But the opposition to imperialist war finds no expression in official politics. This only underscores that the struggle against war requires the mobilization of the working class as an independent political force in opposition to the entire social-political order.



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