

Canada's parliament votes to join new Mideast war

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9 October 2014

Canada's House of Commons has adopted a motion endorsing the Conservative government's decision to have Canada take a frontline role in the new US war in the Middle East.

Even before Tuesday evening's vote, Canadian military personnel had been dispatched to the Middle East to prepare for the deployment of nine Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) planes—six CF-18 fighters, two Aurora surveillance planes, and an air-to-air refuel aircraft.

The CF-18s will be deployed for up to six months in bombing targets in Iraq and possibly Syria. Some six hundred Canadian Armed Forces' personnel are to be deployed to pilot and service the nine planes, which will likely be stationed in Kuwait or the United Arab Emirates.

The government has also announced that the previously announced 30-day deployment of 69 Special Forces troops to "assist and train" Peshmerga Kurdish militia forces will be extended through March 2015.

The government has made much of the fact that it has only authorized a six-month "combat mission." But the Conservatives have also placed on record that the mission could be extended.

The two-day parliamentary debate that preceded Tuesday's 157-134 vote in favour of the government war motion was full of patriotic bombast, "war on terror" lies and fear-mongering, and humanitarian posturing. And this is true not only of Prime Minister Harper and his Conservatives, but also of the opposition parties.

The trade union-backed NDP, the Liberals, Bloc Quebecois, and Green Party leader Elizabeth May are all hypocritically and cynically posing as opponents of "Harper's war."

Hypocritically, because, as their own contributions to the debate made clear, the opposition parties fully support the war's imperialist aims: the shoring up of the pro-US regime in Iraq; the ouster of Syria's Baathist regime, which is a close ally of Russia and Iran; and the strengthening of US imperialism's military-strategic hegemony over the world's most important oil-exporting region.

Cynically, because the opposition parties were well aware that they could make an appeal to the widespread popular anti-war sentiment without it "damaging" Canada's "credibility" with Washington. As the Conservatives have a comfortable parliamentary majority, the outcome of the House of Commons' war debate and vote was a foregone conclusion.

The Conservative case for war consisted of lurid invocations of beheadings and other Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) atrocities and claims that if Canada did not defeat ISIS in the Middle East it would have to be fought and defeated in Canada.

In an especially transparent and cynical gesture, Foreign Minister John Baird, the government's lead speaker in the debate, announced that Canada is establishing a \$10 million fund to aid victims of ISIS sexual violence and prosecute the perpetrators.

Needless to say, government speakers made no mention of the destruction wrought by the illegal 2003 US invasion of Iraq, nor of Washington's subsequent manipulation and stoking of sectarian-communal tensions in Iraq as part of a "divide and rule" strategy.

And they breathed not a word about how ISIS and other Islamacist terrorist groups have been financed and armed by the US, other western powers, and Canada's Mideast allies, including Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, so as to serve as proxies in US-fomented wars for "regime change"—first in Libya and now Syria.

In announcing the Canadian Armed Forces' new Middle East "combat mission" last Friday, Harper was somewhat more honest as to its true, predatory motivations. Canada has to stand with the US, he asserted, if it "wants to keep its voice in the world—and we should, since so many of our challenges are global. Being a free rider means you are not taken seriously."

In other words, argued Canada's Prime Minister, to assert its global interests—including staking a claim to a share in the imperialist reordering of the Middle East—the Canadian elite must march alongside the US, its principal military-strategic

and economic partner for the better part of a century.

Opposition speakers in this week's war debate did make mention of the Iraq War. But they did so from the standpoint that it had ill-served imperialist interests—not that it was a crime in which Canada was complicit and that the current US-Canadian imperialist war in the Middle East is a continuation of the drive to assert unbridled US hegemony over the region.

NDP leader Tomas Mulcair tabled an amendment to the government's war motion that made it clear that the social-democrats' differences with the government are at most tactical—are rooted in the concern that another protracted direct western intervention in the Middle East could redound against imperialist interests and fuel social opposition at home.

The NDP proposed that instead of undertaking a “combat mission,” Canada should support the US-led military campaign against ISIS by having Canada's military transport weapons to the region, with a view to strengthening “capable and enabled local forces”—i.e. the Iraqi government, Kurdish militia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the other absolutist Gulf monarchies—so that they can pacify the region in the interests of imperialism.

The NDP motion also called for increased Canadian involvement in the region and support for the US's new Mideast war by way of a so-called “humanitarian aid” campaign. It concluded with a paean to the “brave men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces who stand on guard for all of us.”

Mulcair and other NDP speakers voiced outrage over the fact that the Harper government has said it would be ready to participate in a bombing campaign in Syria if it was explicitly supported by the Syrian government. Using the very rhetoric western governments, including Canada's, have used to justify their support for the al-Qaeda and ISIS-spearheaded insurgency in Syria, Mulcair denounced Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as “a genocidal maniac.”

Mulcair and the NDP, it need be noted, have repeatedly supported Canada's participation in US-led imperialist wars, dating back to the 1999 NATO war on Yugoslavia, and this summer gave their full-throated support to the Israeli invasion of Gaza.

The Liberals, for their part, had repeatedly signaled that they were ready to lend their support to a Canadian “combat mission” in the Middle East. But last week, Liberal leader Justin Trudeau announced that his party would not give its sanction to the proposed deployment of nine RCAF aircraft, claiming that the government had yet to make a compelling case for it.

Speaking in the war debate on Monday, Liberal Defence critic Marc Garneau said the Liberals “are prepared” for

Canada “to play a military role of a non-combat nature,” presumably involving training, advice, surveillance, and transport. The next day Garneau went still further, announcing that the Liberals “will of course support what is eventually decided by the government, because we know that we're sending our men and women into combat” and once they “are out there, we have to be supportive.”

The two-member Green Party caucus split on whether to openly support Canada taking on a combat role in the Middle East. While party leader Elizabeth May supported the NDP motion, her colleague, Thunder Bay MP Bruce Hyer, voted for Canada to go to war for the fourth time in 15 years.

With most of the country's major dailies, including the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, *Montreal Gazette*, and *Ottawa Citizen*, strongly supporting Canada taking on a frontline role in the new Mideast war, there is growing dissent within NDP and especially Liberal ranks over their “anti-war” posture.

On Tuesday, Gary Doer, Manitoba's former NDP premier and Canada's current US ambassador, strongly endorsed the government's decision to join Obama's war coalition, adding that as an NDP Premier he had proudly supported Canada's role in the Afghan counter-insurgency war.

Former Liberal Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy has publicly criticized the party's stance as a break with Liberal “traditions, principles and history.” Meanwhile, former Liberal Justice Minister Irwin Cotler, who abstained in Tuesday's vote, has said he did so not because he is opposed to Canada taking on a “combat role” in Iraq, but because he believes Canada should have gone to war in Syria in 2011 to overthrow the Assad regime and lacks a “coherent” Mideast strategy today.



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