

Canada sending troops to Ukraine on two-year training mission

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Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced Tuesday that Canada will deploy 200 armed forces personnel to western Ukraine for two years to train the army and national guard of Ukraine's rightwing, US-backed government.

Appearing alongside Defence Minister Jason Kenney and Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF) chief General Tom Lawson, Harper cast the deployment as a response to Russian belligerence. In a written statement, he declared, "Canada continues to stand with the people of Ukraine in the face of the Putin regime's ongoing aggression. The Canadian military contribution being announced today will help Ukrainian forces' personnel to better defend their country's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

The deployment is an escalation of the aggressive drive led by the United States and supported by Canada and Washington's other imperialist allies to subordinate Russia to their predatory geostrategic and economic interests. The US and German backed-coup in Kiev in February 2014 overthrew Ukraine's elected president and brought to power a pro-western regime committed to harnessing Kiev to the US, NATO and the European Union. When Russia responded by annexing Crimea, the NATO powers portrayed Moscow as the aggressor so as to justify an unprecedented military build-up in Eastern Europe and the Baltic, including provocative air and navy patrols along Russia's border.

Now Canada is following the lead of the US and Britain and deploying troops to Ukraine to train not only its armed forces, but also its national guard. The latter includes in its ranks large numbers of recruits from the Right Sector and other ultra-nationalist and fascist militia.

Canada has been a close ally in Washington's longstanding drive to detach Ukraine from Russia's sphere of influence and transform it into a western satellite. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Canada, under Liberal and Conservative governments alike and working in concert with the US National Endowment for Democracy, poured money into Ukraine so as to finance pro-western media, parties and "civil society" groups. In doing so, it leveraged a network of rightwing Ukrainian-Canadian organizations, many of which openly venerate the Ukrainian nationalists, led by Stefan Bandera, who collaborated with the Nazis during World War II, including in

the mass extermination of Jews.

Harper was the first western-head of government to visit Kiev following the 2014 coup. Ever since, Canada has functioned as a steadfast defender of the Kiev regime on the international stage. It has repeatedly joined with the US to press the EU to impose still harsher economic sanctions on Russia and strongly supported NATO's new deployments to Eastern Europe and the Black Sea.

While NATO has thus far refrained from providing the Kiev regime with "offensive" weaponry, the Harper government is supporting the efforts of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) and the newly-established Army SOS fundraising organization to purchase weapons and other military equipment for the Ukrainian military and its militia allies. (See: Canada helping arm Kiev regime to fight Ukrainian civil war)

Ottawa has also supplied \$570 million in official aid to Kiev, including non-lethal military equipment and loans. Also this week, it was revealed that the government has given the Ukrainian army access to satellite imaging technology under the pretext of allowing them to track foreign forces on their territory.

The CAF training mission, which will run until the end of March 2017, will include training in bomb disposal techniques, mine location, emergency medical care and flight safety.

Government representatives went out of their way to insist that Canadian soldiers will not become involved in fighting in Ukraine, which broke out again earlier this week. Officials emphasized that the troops will be unarmed and based at a NATO centre in the west of the country some 1,300 KM from the areas in the east where fighting has taken place.

Defence Minister Kenney, however, did effectively acknowledge that Canada and its allies are locked in an escalating confrontation with Russia, and this was further reinforced by a government statement that vowed Canada "will never recognize the illegal Russian occupation of Crimea."

"We believe," said Kenney, "that a message of resolve and deterrence is the best way to prevent a miscalculation with Mr. Putin."

The reality is that it is the US, Canada and the other western powers that have been pursuing confrontation with Russia. With troops from NATO member states, including the US, now

present in Ukraine, and planes and troops under the NATO banner deployed to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, just minutes from the Russian border, the risks of a regional and world war have increased exponentially.

Canada's deployment to the Ukraine comes barely two weeks after the Harper government announced the extension and expansion of Canada's participation in the US-led Mideast war. In flagrant violation of international law, Canadian war planes are now bombing Syria, a move that represents a giant step toward Canada's ultimate participation in a war for regime change in Damascus.

Unsurprisingly, the Russian response to Canada's Ukraine training mission was swift. A Russian embassy statement termed the deployment "deplorable and counter-productive." "It would be much more reasonable to concentrate on diplomacy and encourage authorities in Kiev to finally enter into a genuine political dialogue with Donetsk and Lugansk Republics as it was agreed upon in (the) 'Minsk-2' accords in February," it continued.

Canada's ruling elite has strongly supported the Harper government's aggressive stance against Russia over the past 18 months.

For decades the Canadian bourgeoisie has viewed its military-security partnership with Washington as pivotal to its global interests and ambitions. Under conditions where US imperialism is seeking to offset the decline in its economic position through aggression and war, Canada's elite is eagerly following suit. Its mercenary aim is to retain a "special relationship" with the US and a "seat at the table" in the imperialist re-division of the world.

In the Mideast war, Canada is the only western US ally conducting air strikes in Syria. In Asia, Canada is fully implicated in the "US pivot," which is aimed at strategically isolating and encircling China. In the fall of 2013, Ottawa and Washington signed a secret "Defense Policy Cooperation Framework" to enhance Canadian-US military cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. The CAF is also seeking to establish new forward military bases in the region, including in Singapore and South Korea.

The parliamentary opposition parties, the New Democratic Party (NDP) and Liberals, are fully committed to the defence of the interests of Canadian imperialism. In the case of Russia, they have lent their backing to every escalation of the crisis brought about by the actions of the US and its allies. When Harper made headlines at last November's G-20 summit for telling Putin bluntly to "get out of Ukraine," the NDP's only objection was that his actions did not go far enough. NDP foreign policy spokesman Paul Dewar criticized the Harper government, saying that it was not clear how mere words could meet the concerns raised by Russian "aggression."

Liberal leader Justin Trudeau reacted to the latest deployment by announcing his party is behind the mission. Pointing to Canada's long-standing and close relationship with Ukraine, he

observed that the deployment was "a responsible thing for Canada to do as part of an international effort."

With an election fast approaching, NDP leader Thomas Mulcair thought it politic not to be seen endorsing another aggressive action of the Harper government on the world stage. But he and the NDP have not outright opposed the CAF deployment, nor made any fundamental criticism of the fact that Canadian troops will now be present in the Ukraine and in support of an extreme rightwing government that has repeatedly threatened and goaded Russia.

Mulcair criticized Harper for not consulting with the opposition parties prior to this week's announcement and said it was "a dangerous precedent" to make the deployment without a parliamentary debate. He also expressed concern that Canada's deployment is not being done as part of a NATO mission.

Mulcair's minor quibbles with the government over the way in which the mission was announced should fool no one. The NDP has repeatedly supported Canada waging imperialist war, including its leading roles in the 1999 NATO war on Yugoslavia, the Afghan war and the 2011 NATO assault on Libya.

As for Mulcair's boosting of NATO—he similarly complained last month that Canada's Mideast war deployment isn't under the NATO banner—it only underscores the extent to which the trade union-backed NDP is a party of imperialist war.

The US-led military alliance has been the linchpin of Washington's drive to assert military geopolitical dominance over Eurasia since the beginning of the Cold War, and it has been at the center of the current drive against Russia. This includes not only the aforementioned deployments to Eastern Europe, the Baltic states and the Black Sea, but also the creation of a new 30,000-strong NATO "rapid reaction force," so that combat troops can deploy to Russia's borders on just a few hours' notice.



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