Canadian prime minister backs right-wing regime in Ukraine

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Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper visited the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, Saturday to reaffirm Ottawa's support for Ukraine's ultra-nationalist, pro-western regime and the US-led drive against Russia.

From Kiev, Harper flew to Germany for the G-7 summit, at which he promised to advocate for the Ukrainian regime—i.e. to join Washington in pressing for no let-up in the economic sanctions, aggressive NATO military deployments, and war threats against Russia.

At a joint press conference with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Harper declared: "While Ukraine may not have a seat at the (G-7) table, I can assure you, Mr. President, the situation will be very high on Canada's agenda."

Earlier in a written statement, Harper again sought to paint Russia as the "aggressor." Amid renewed fighting in east Ukraine, where much of the population has rebelled against Kiev with Russia's support, Harper declared: "Canada strongly condemns Russia's aggressive actions in Eastern Ukraine and its illegal annexation of Crimea, and will continue to stand with the people of Ukraine in the face of the ongoing violation of the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

This turns reality on its head. It is the western powers, led by the US and Germany, that have been pushing to detach Ukraine from Russia's sphere of influence and transform it into a source of cheap labour and natural resources for western imperialism and a staging area for provocations against Russia. In response to the Russian ruling elite's predictable attempts to counter this existential threat, it is the western powers that have deployed troops on Russia's borders and battleships in the Black Sea, violating NATO's earlier pledge that it would not permanently station forces in Eastern Europe.

Canada has long been playing a critical role in the drive to harness Ukraine to the West and to strategically isolate Russia and topple Putin—a campaign that threatens to provoke all-out war between nuclear-armed states.

Harper's visit to Kiev was the third he has made since the US-orchestrated, fascist-led coup of February 2014 that overthrew Ukraine's elected president, Victor Yanukovych.

Canada has joined in the NATO deployments on Russia's borders, sending troops and war planes to the Baltic states and Eastern Europe and warships to the Black Sea. In August, 200 Canadian Armed Forces personnel will deploy to the western Ukraine to provide training, alongside US and British forces, to Ukrainian army and National Guard units.

Canada has repeatedly seconded US calls for their European allies to take a more belligerent stance against Russia. At last November's G-20 meeting, Harper provocatively snubbed Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, telling him "to get out of Ukraine" to accolades from Canadian media.

In Kiev this Saturday, Harper announced plans to provide funding and equipment for a new civil police force. Ottawa will also send a contingent of police officers to Ukraine to train the force and to advise what the media called "other security institutions." This likely refers to the Kiev regime's National Guard, which comprises many fighters from ultra-nationalist and outright fascist volunteer militia.

Harper was accompanied on his trip by representatives of the right-wing Ukrainian Canadian Congress and its affiliates, including the Canadian representatives of Army SOS, which is supplying military equipment and weaponry to the Ukrainian

army and aligned militias.

While the Harper government claims that it is not providing lethal military equipment to the Kiev regime—in line with current US, EU and NATO policy—Army SOS is doing so, with Ottawa's encouragement. Through its networks of Canadian volunteers, Army SOS has supplied the Ukrainian Army and its militia allies with uniforms, medical equipment, surveillance technology including drones, and lethal weapons such as parts for sniper rifles.

The participation of Army SOS representatives in the delegation Harper led to Kiev this past weekend underscores the support it enjoys at the highest levels of the state. Earlier this year, an Army SOS event in Toronto, which raised over C$50,000, was addressed by two Conservative MPs.

On the eve of the Harper's departure for Kiev, Ukraine's chargé d'affaires in Canada, Marko Shevchenko, hailed Canada's role, claiming that Ukraine's "relations … with Canada are deeper and much more significant than with any other country in the world."

This comment underscores the close ties between Ukraine's ultra-nationalist government, Harper's Conservatives, and the Canadian ruling class more generally.

Shevchenko hailed the military aid being provided by Ottawa. "The Canadian government, led by Stephen Harper, is," he said, "the world leader in providing such non-lethal assistance to Ukraine."

In comments which say a great deal about Canada's constant involvement in imperialist wars in recent years, Sevchenko said Ukraine stood to benefit greatly from Canadian military assistance. "The Canadian Armed Forces has big experience in contemporary war," he said. "Ukrainian forces didn't have such experience until last year."

The wars Shevchenko referred to include: Canada's leading role in NATO's bombardment of Yugoslavia in 1999; its 10-year deployment of troops in the Afghan war; its prominent role in NATO's 2011 "regime change" war in Libya; and its on-going deployment of aircraft and special forces personnel to Iraq and Syria, in a war aimed ostensibly at combating ISIS, but which aims to shore up US hegemony over the world's most important oil-exporting region.

As during these previous interventions, the Harper government's embrace of the far-right Kiev regime and aggressive stance against Russia enjoy overwhelming support within Canada's political and corporate elite.

Jack Harris, the defence spokesman for the official opposition, the trade union-supported New Democratic Party (NDP), made clear his party's support for Harper's actions to support the Kiev regime and NATO's provocative deployments on Russia's borders, declaring, "we do not have a problem with that at all."

Paul Dewar, the NDP's foreign affairs spokesman, weighed in with a call for additional sanctions on Russia over the case of imprisoned Ukrainian pilot Nadiya Savchenko. He added, "I want to reassure, from our side of the House, the people of Ukraine that we are there to help the people of Ukraine."

James Bezan, the parliamentary secretary to national defence minister Jason Kenney, made a telling reference to the integration of the activities of SOS Ukraine with those of the Canadian state. Bezan said,"We also have people over there who have done great work, such as Lenna Koszarny, who is a Canadian living in Ukraine. …. She is working with our ambassador, Roman Waschuk … to make sure … that our great military equipment is getting into the right hands and is being well-used." Koszarny is a coordinator of Army SOS as well as a leading member of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress.

The House of Commons debate also shed light on Ottawa's direct involvement in imposing brutal austerity measures on Ukrainian workers. After praising Porroshenko's commitment to "significant," "market-based," "structural and economic reforms" to tie Ukraine's economy to the West, International Trade Minster Ed Fast boasted that Canada is "playing a role in those reforms."

The economic advisory council that President Poroshenko has established, continued Fast, "is actually headed by a Canadian, Mr. Basil Kalymon of the Richard Ivey School of Business at Western University."