

Canadian troops begin mission to train Ukrainian Army and National Guard

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Some 200 Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) personnel arrived in western Ukraine last week to participate in the US-led mission to train Ukrainian Army and National Guard units for the war that the Kiev regime is waging against pro-Russian separatists in the country's east.

The Conservative government of Stephen Harper claims the two-year deployment will cost \$32 million. Canadian troops will deliver tactical training, as well as assisting with marksmanship, combat medicine and dealing with improvised explosive devices.

The dispatch of CAF personnel to Ukraine exemplifies the Canadian ruling elite's full support for the US drive to roll back Russian influence in Eastern Europe and draw Kiev into its sphere of influence. Harper was the first western leader to visit Kiev and meet with the leaders of the new pro-US regime after the February 2014, fascist-spearheaded, US- and German-orchestrated coup that overthrew Ukraine's elected President Viktor Yanukovich.

Over the past 18 months, the Canadian government has built on its longstanding involvement in Ukraine since the demise of the Soviet Union to emerge as one of Kiev's staunchest supporters and among the most bellicose opponents of Russia. Harper has repeatedly joined with US President Obama to press European governments to take more aggressive measures against Moscow for its backing for the separatists in eastern Ukraine and for having incorporated the Crimea into Russia after a local referendum massively endorsed the step.

Canada has deployed ships and planes to join NATO operations on Russia's eastern European and Black Sea borders—operations that threaten a military clash with Moscow that could quickly spiral out of control.

While imposing stringent economic sanctions against Moscow, the Conservative government has provided a total of \$570 million in aid to Kiev and recently signed a Canada-Ukraine free trade pact. Ottawa has also granted the Ukrainian army access to CAF satellite technology to enable them to track the movements of the pro-Russian rebels.

The Conservative government's attempts to present the

CAF Ukraine training mission as motivated by concern for democracy and human rights were given the lie by a Ukrainian general who stressed the valuable contribution Canadian forces can play because of their frontline experience in the neocolonial Afghan war. "We greatly value the professionalism and experience of the Canadians in Afghanistan," Col. Igor Slisarchuk, commanding officer of the Ukrainian Army's 30th Mechanized Division, said. "It will be a great assistance to our military."

The reference to Afghanistan exposes the training mission for what it really is: an aggressive move by US imperialism and its allies to intensify the encirclement of Russia and prepare for military conflict. From 2005 to 2011, the Canadian military played a leading role in the counterinsurgency war in Kandahar Province in southern Afghanistan. Not only was this a vital front in the US-led occupation of this impoverished country; Canada initially assumed a major role in Kandahar so as to enable the US to concentrate on suppressing opposition to its illegal 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Ukraine's 30th Mechanized Division has been at the forefront of the combat with the separatists in the east since the outbreak of the civil war. According to the *Globe and Mail*, Canadian troops will take advantage of their interaction with the division to learn about "so-called hybrid warfare—a mixture of covert and classic military tactics—employed by the pro-Russian forces," as well as learn more about Russian weaponry.

Canada is fully involved in the strategic, geopolitical and military operations of US imperialism around the world: in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the US-led Pivot to Asia, which aims to militarily-strategically isolate and encircle China.

The Canadian bourgeoisie considers its decades-long alliance with Washington as essential to securing its growing geopolitical and economic interests around the world. In respect to Russia, these include an increasingly bitter conflict over territorial claims in the Arctic and the hope that Canada can benefit, through increased energy exports, from

the push to lessen Europe's dependence on Russian oil and natural gas exports.

In Ukraine, the Conservative government has not shrunk from aligning with the most reactionary political forces. It has given tacit backing to a group of volunteers organized by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, to provide aid, including weapons parts, directly to the Ukrainian army and volunteer ultranationalist battalions, among whose ranks are members of the far right Svoboda Party and Right Sector neo-fascist militia. (See: Canada helping arm Kiev regime to fight Ukrainian civil war)

Earlier this month, Foreign Minister Rob Nicholson rejected attempts to blame these extreme right-wing forces for clashes with government security forces that resulted in the deaths of three security personnel when a right-wing extremist threw a grenade during a demonstration. According to Nicholson, the violence was the fault of Russian President Putin. "This tragic incident draw [sic] its source from the instability caused by Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine, in particular those orchestrated by Putin and his regime," declared Nicholson.

Canada, like the US, has insisted that its Ukraine military training mission will not involve neo-Nazis—a damning admission as to the true character of the militia aligned with the Ukraine government. But the ban itself is largely meaningless, because many members of the most notorious volunteer battalions have already been absorbed into the National Guard.

The Conservatives' Ukraine policy has the full support of the entire Canadian political establishment.

In comments earlier this month, New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Thomas Mulcair reaffirmed his party's support for the deployment of Canadian troops in western Ukraine. He sought to contrast the Ukraine mission, which he claimed was being undertaken as part of Canada's international alliances, with Canada's participation in the bombardment of Syria and Iraq, a mission that Mulcair has criticized and claims to oppose.

In truth, the Ukraine deployment is a US-led operation involving Canada and the UK, and is not being conducted through NATO structures. Ukraine is not a NATO member, although the alliance has increasingly sought to integrate the country's armed forces into its multinational exercises to improve interoperability and prepare the way for Kiev to join.

The NDP has repeatedly demonstrated its unflinching support for Canadian imperialism, supporting Canada's participation in a series of US wars and regime change operations, including the 1999 war on Yugoslavia, the Afghan war, the 2004 ouster of Haiti's elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the 2011 "regime change" war in

Libya. While Mulcair poses as an opponent of the current Mideast war, his differences with the government are purely tactical. The NDP supports both the US campaign to replace the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, which is aligned with Russia and Iran, and Washington and Ottawa's broader objective of shoring up US hegemony over the Middle East, the world's most important oil-exporting region.

Mulcair has also joined Harper this week in denouncing Liberal leader Justin Trudeau for announcing that a Liberal government would shut the door to Canada buying a fleet of "fifth-generation" F-35 fighter jets and redirect the savings into new ships for the navy.

The Liberals' support for Canada's intervention in Ukraine has been no less forthright. They are firmly behind the current training mission, and have repeatedly vowed to continue to support Ukraine and the brutal austerity measures its government is carrying out in collaboration with the International Monetary Fund. Trudeau applauded the Conservatives' sanctions against Moscow, even calling earlier this year for the government to go further and cut off some Russian banks from the global SWIFT payments network.

Trudeau embraced the narrative of Russian aggression in a statement released on August 24 to coincide with Ukrainian independence day. "Today," he proclaimed, "as the people of Ukraine continue their fight for freedom in the face of escalating Russian aggression, we strongly reiterate our commitment to actively and constructively assist in the rebuilding of Ukraine's economic and democratic institutions."

Trudeau concluded his statement by urging Canada to apply "increased political and economic pressure on Russia to end its interference in Ukrainian affairs."



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