

Trudeau pledges Canada's support for French military interventions

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Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has promised French President François Hollande that Canada will support and assist French military interventions in the Middle East and Africa, including as part of the US-led coalition that is waging war in Iraq and Syria.

Trudeau met Hollande in the French capital Sunday just ahead of the opening of the Paris COP21 climate change summit, which Trudeau attended on Monday and Tuesday. At a brief press appearance following his meeting with Trudeau, Hollande praised Canada as a close ally, and said he accepted Trudeau's explanation that the withdrawal of Canada's six CF-18 fighter jets from bombing raids in Iraq and Syria will not diminish Canada's role in the anti-ISIS war coalition.

Trudeau had repeated to Hollande his public pledge to increase the number of Canadian Special Forces troops deployed to Iraq. Standing beside the French president he declared, "We will make sure that we all play a role in order to curb this terrorist threat."

Trudeau's meeting with Hollande came just two days after it was confirmed that his Liberal government will continue to deploy two surveillance aircraft and a refueling jet to assist the coalition bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria.

The Liberals sought to appeal to anti-war sentiment during the campaign for the October 19 federal election by trumpeting their supposed intention to end Canada's "combat mission" in Iraq and Syria. But since taking office, they have been at pains to assert that Canada will continue to play a significant role in the US-led war in the Middle East.

Whilst purportedly targeting ISIS, Washington's principal goal is to overthrow the Assad regime in Damascus, so as to strengthen US domination over the world's largest oil-exporting region.

During the election campaign, Trudeau also postured as an opponent of authoritarian state powers, pledging to modify the Harper Conservative government's draconian anti-terrorist legislation, C-51. Yet he breathed no criticism of the French government's brutal repression of climate change protests in Paris Sunday under newly-enhanced state of

emergency powers. This is a situation where silence speaks volumes.

Instead, Trudeau indicated his government's eagerness to deepen collaboration with the French state as it launches a frontal assault on basic democratic rights. "We talked about some of the close collaboration between Quebec specifically and France on counter-radicalization and talked about the various things Canada can continue to do and will continue to do in the fight against terrorism," Trudeau told the press outside the Élysée Palace.

On the sidelines of the climate change conference, Trudeau also had his first face-to-face meeting since becoming prime minister with his Israeli counterpart, Benjamin Netanyahu. The pair had already talked by phone shortly after Trudeau's election. At that time, Canada's Prime Minister has assured Netanyahu that whilst his government would not use the same bellicose language as Harper, it would be no less a staunch supporter of Israel's brutal suppression of the Palestinian people.

As under Harper's Conservative government, Canada demonstrated its unwavering support for Tel Aviv last week, when it joined with the US and a handful of small Pacific island states in voting against a series of UN General Assembly resolutions critical of Israeli policy.

The arming and promotion of Israel is an essential component of US Mideast strategy, fully endorsed by Canada's new government, with the aim of protecting Washington's economic and geostrategic interests throughout the Middle East and countering any challenge from Iran, Russia or China.

Like Harper, the Liberal government also strongly supports the US-NATO campaign against Russia and, via its support for the Trans Pacific Partnership, the US "Pivot to Asia," which is aimed at isolating and encircling China economically, militarily and geo-strategically.

At Tuesday's NATO meeting of foreign ministers in Brussels, Foreign Minister Stéphane Dion proclaimed Ottawa's full support for Turkey in the wake of its downing of a Russian fighter jet last week, declaring that NATO has

to come to Ankara's aid.

Dion also defended Canada's decision to focus on training proxy forces in Iraq, saying that it is far better for Canada to contribute to the US-led war coalition in areas where it could be a "great supporter" rather than "delivering 2 percent of the airstrikes."

Trudeau has already announced his government will increase the number of Canadian military trainers in Iraq, and Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan has raised the prospect of broadening the training mission to include Iraqi army forces, not just Kurdish Peshmerga fighters as is currently the case. "When it comes to seizing ground and taking that fight [to Islamic State]," Sajjan told the *Globe and Mail*, "it cannot be achieved without people on the ground. That right now is the Iraqi army. We need to make sure they do this."

The Foreign minister for the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq, Falah Mustafa Bakir, visited Canada last week for meetings with top Defence Department officials, including Sajjan. Bakir commented during the trip that the Kurdish Peshmerga are in need of weapons, ammunition, medical training, and communications equipment. In arguing that Canada has much expertise to offer the Peshmerga, media commentators have frequently pointed to the leading role Canada played in the Afghan counter-insurgency war.

Discussions are also underway within ruling circles about other areas where Canadian troops could assist French imperialist operations. Earlier this fall, Canada's military came to the support of France's Operation Barkhane in North Africa, which is aimed at consolidating French imperialist interests in its former colonial stomping ground under the guise of an anti-terrorism mission. Just days before Trudeau and Hollande met, a Canadian CC-177 Globemaster aircraft made the second of four promised flights to transport military equipment to French forces in North Africa.

Operation Barkhane is a mission involving 3,000 French troops throughout the Sahel region, stretching from the borders of Sudan in the east to Mali and Mauritania in western Africa. It covers Chad, Niger, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali and Gambia, all former French colonies. Within the framework of this operation, France has, among other aggressive acts, carried out the targeted assassination of French citizens in Mali.

Significantly, Canada's decision to take part in Operation Barkhane was reached in the midst of the recently concluded election campaign, with the first transportation flight occurring on September 28. Yet not a word about this new military engagement was breathed during the 77 days of campaigning.

Foreign policy analysts are urging the Trudeau government to expand Canada's participation in Operation

Barkhane as a quid pro quo for the withdrawal of its CF-18 fighter jets from the Middle East. David Perry, a senior analyst at the Canadian Global Affairs Institute, told *Maclean's* magazine November 19, "There's definitely a possibility, if the Canadian government was interested, of contributing some aircraft." He added that the removal of support personnel from the Canadian Armed Forces' base in Kuwait would free up resources for an Africa mission.

In 2013, when Paris deployed troops to Mali to support the government against separatist rebels in the country's north, the former Conservative government, with all party support, provided Canadian air power. At least 50 flights were carried out by Globemaster transport aircraft to shift supplies and French troops to the West African country.

Canadian imperialism has been stepping up military activity in Africa for some time, above all in conjunction with US imperialism. In 2011, the Canadian Armed Forces played a leading role alongside France in the US-led coalition in Libya, which killed thousands in a months-long air war and helped Islamist militias overthrow the Gaddafi regime.

Canadian troops have been involved in the US military's Africom-led Exercise Flintlock, which aims to train special forces troops in Niger, Mauritania, Mali and Senegal. A small contingent of soldiers from the Canadian Special Operations Regiment (CSOR) have been joining the annual training mission since 2011, and as a result, CSOR personnel were training forces in Mali a year before the outbreak of civil war there.

The Canadian bourgeoisie has significant economic interests in the region, including major mining and energy operations in Mali, Burkina Faso and Nigeria. Across the African continent, Canadian mining corporations have invested more than \$30 billion.

In 2014, the Harper government developed a Global Market Action Plan, which identified eleven countries in sub-Saharan Africa as "priority emerging markets" with "specific business opportunities." These include Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Ivory Coast. Foreign investment "protection agreements" to support Canadian corporations have been signed with ten countries in the region, among them Mali, Burkina Faso and Nigeria.



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