

Canada's Liberal government finalizes \$15 billion Saudi arms deal

Carl Bronski
20 April 2016

In the latest example of the unbridled hypocrisy and prevarication that is the stock-in-trade of all parties in the Canadian parliament, Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his minister of foreign affairs, Stephane Dion, have been caught out lying shamelessly about Canada's \$15 billion arms deal with the brutal, US-backed Saudi monarchy.

For months, Dion claimed that the sale of General Dynamics-manufactured Light Armoured Vehicles (LAVs) was a "done deal" that the previous Conservative government had signed off on long ago. But it has now been revealed that the Harper Conservatives only signed permits to authorize providing the Saudi regime with technical details about the LAVs—machines billed by arms manufacturers as useful in quelling both domestic disturbances and, when mounted with heavy weaponry, generalized warfare.

If the deal is now proceeding, it is because earlier this month Dion surreptitiously signed permits saying that the sale conforms with Canada's arms control and human rights policies, and authorizing the delivery of the first \$11 billion worth of LAVs to Saudi Arabia. As part of this process, Dion certified that "there is no reasonable risk that the goods might be used against the civilian population."

In fact, it can be said with certainty that the LAVs will be used by the increasingly shaky Saudi regime "against the civilian population"—to intimidate it and, in all likelihood, bloodily suppress it. The LAVs are destined for the Saudi National Guard, which, as Wikipedia notes, "differs from the Saudi army in being forged out of tribal elements loyal to the House of Saud and tasked with protecting the royal family from internal dangers such as a coup d'état."

Much to Dion and the Liberals' chagrin, their duplicitous attempt to evade responsibility for the arms deal was exposed, due to a document release the government was compelled to make in fighting a court suit filed by University of Montreal law professor Daniel Turp challenging the sale of weaponry to Saudi Arabia.

Moving into damage control, Trudeau attempted to shrug off his government's duplicity and even more importantly the exposure of its steadfast support for the Saudi regime. "The fact is there are jobs in London (Ontario) relying on this," Trudeau told parliament. "Commitments have been made to the world

that we will honour our good name when we sign our contracts."

That the "good name" of a government can be salvaged by publicly defending the sale of weaponry to a semi-feudal kingdom currently engaged in the slaughter of thousands of civilians in Yemen, the backing of Jihadist forces in the rape of Syria as part of a US-led regime change operation, as well as systematic internal repression, torture and mass beheadings has met with no cogent response from the opposition parties in the House of Commons. Indeed, the reactions of the opposition Conservatives and New Democratic Party demonstrate that the ruling elite is overwhelmingly of the opinion that its imperialist interests in the region should trump any professed concern for human rights.

The all-party support for the Saudi arms deal exemplifies Canada's predatory foreign policy and close alliance with Washington, which has propped up and armed the Saudi regime for decades.

Prior to the LAV deal with Riyadh, the bulk of Canadian arms exports were to the United States—a country that has pursued one war of aggression after another for the past 25 years and routinely violates international law to carry out summary executions via drone strikes, bombing campaigns, support terrorist groups and mount full-scale ground invasions.

The "Memorandum of Action" signed by Dion to consummate the sale of the fighting vehicles outlines the real reasons for all-party agreement on the matter and further exposes the lies of all those who have explained away their complicity with the claim that jobs and commercial credibility are at stake.

The memorandum explicitly justifies the shipment in terms of the geopolitical interests of Canadian imperialism. Riyadh is "a key partner, and an important and stable ally in a region marred by instability, terrorism and conflict, declares the memorandum. "Canada," it continues, "appreciates Saudi Arabia's role as a regional leader promoting regional security and stability, as well as countering the threat posed by Iranian regional expansionism and ISIS."

The memorandum goes on to state that "there is a long-standing defence relationship" with Riyadh and that Canada's military and weapons exports will benefit from the sale by

producing “economies of scale” in Canadian arms manufacture.

The Trudeau government is currently pressing ahead with another multibillion-dollar Mideast arms deal, this time with the Kingdom of Kuwait.

The Liberal government has also tripled the deployment of Canadian Special Forces to Iraq, bringing the total number of Canadian troops deployed in support of the US-led Mideast war to 830, whilst quietly supporting Riyadh’s continuing aggression in Yemen, its role in suppressing opposition to Bahrain’s autocratic government, and its arming of jihadist proxies in Syria.

Canada’s Defence Minister, Harjit Sajjan, recently met with his counterpart in the blood-soaked Egyptian regime of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to discuss increased military-security collaboration.

The Liberals have also signalled to Washington that they are actively considering joining in another military incursion into Libya and Trudeau has vowed to continue Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s staunch support of Israel and its brutal treatment of the Palestinian population. Last month the Liberals adopted a Conservative-drafted, Israeli government-inspired parliamentary resolution denouncing the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel.

The BDS movement is based on a politically bankrupt nationalist perspective that holds the Israeli working class equally responsible for the country’s brutal treatment of the Palestinian population and advocates a reactionary two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict within an imperialist-dominated Middle East. Nevertheless, the parliamentary resolution was an explicit attack from the right, aimed at rallying support for the Israeli state and casting the BDS as “anti-Semitic,” so as to provide a pretext for prescribing the BDS campaign on university campuses.

The efforts of the opposition parties to criticize the government for its role in the Saudi arms deal were no less disingenuous than the Liberals’ claims their hands were tied. Perhaps most stomach-turning was the performance of NDP leader Thomas Mulcair. Rising in parliament, he directly accused the Liberals of lying about “who signed what and when in the Saudi arms deal.” With quivering finger, he went on to excoriate the brutal practices of the Saudi regime.

Only last autumn, during the federal election campaign, Mulcair and his party had been caught with their own pants down over the very same issue.

During a French-language debate between party leaders, Mulcair briefly challenged Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper on his government’s multibillion-dollar Saudi arms deal. Harper did not deign to address the matter directly whilst Trudeau studiously avoided all comment. However, Mulcair’s tentative foray over the matter did draw the ire of Unifor official Fergo Berto, union area director for the General Dynamics Land Systems plant in London, Ontario, that is

building the LAVs. Berto rebuked Mulcair for publicizing the matter. “We asked the NDP to not make this an issue, that it be kept under wraps,” he complained.

Berto went on to say that Unifor President Jerry Dias had himself called Mulcair to straighten the NDP leader out on the matter. The call apparently did its job. At the Munk Center Debate on foreign policy several days later, neither Mulcair, the debate adjudicators, nor the other party leaders raised the issue.

At a British Columbia town hall meeting in mid-October, Mulcair, duly chastised by Unifor, adopted the same argument now used by the Trudeau government. “You don’t cancel a commercial accord retroactively,” he intoned. “It’s just not done.”

During the election campaign the Conservative Harper and the Liberal Trudeau were no less duplicitous. Harper brushed off questions about supplying arms to the despotic Saudi regime by denying that the deal involved arms at all. The LAVs were simply “transport vehicles.” Trudeau concurred. “These are not arms, these are jeeps,” he said of armoured personnel carriers that are equipped with 25mm cannon and additional ports for anti-tank and anti-aircraft rocket launchers.

When reporters pointed out that he was mistaken, Trudeau then incorrectly opined that in any case, it was strictly “a deal between a manufacturing company here in Canada and Saudi Arabia.” As a matter of record, the arms contract was secured thanks only to strong support from Canada’s government, including the largest ever loan guarantees from the federal government-owned Canadian Commercial Corporation.

For his own part, former Conservative Foreign Minister John Baird has said that he would sign the same deal again today. The fact that Trudeau’s government has followed Harper’s lead “says all you need to say” about the contract, claimed Baird. “It obviously isn’t that bad.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)