

Canadian ruling elite applauds Liberal government for securing seat at Syria peace talks

Roger Jordan
24 May 2016

Ruling circles in Canada responded enthusiastically last week to the announcement that Foreign Minister Stephane Dion would be joining the negotiations led by the US and Russia in Vienna involving the parties in the Syrian civil war.

Dion attended his first meeting of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) last Tuesday, where it was agreed to set a June 1 deadline for the resumption of aid to residents cut off from the outside world by renewed violence.

The meeting failed to agree on a timetable for future talks.

Washington never had any intention of concluding a permanent peace agreement with the Assad regime in Damascus. From the outset of its intervention in Iraq and Syria in the fall of 2014, the US and its allies have been pursuing the goal of regime change in Damascus so as to strengthen Washington's geopolitical hegemony over the world's most important oil-producing region and weaken rivals Iran and Russia.

The invitation extended to Canada to participate in the discussion reflects that it is fully on board with this predatory agenda. At last Tuesday's meeting, Dion was reportedly one of the most strenuous advocates of allied air drops of "humanitarian" supplies to the Syrian population, a pretext which has been used repeatedly over recent years to serve as the trigger for aggressive imperialist interventions.

In a *Globe And Mail* interview, the foreign minister committed Canada to providing a large amount of resources for such operations. "I insisted on the necessity to be strong on air drops of food and medication if we cannot help the population in difficulty," Dion told the *Globe*. "We provide the parachutes and we provide mostly the money to make it possible."

In Syria, the use of a "humanitarian" trigger to justify a full-scale US-led war is no mere distant possibility. The ISSG meeting Dion attended warned any party violating February's cessation of violence agreement with "consequences." US warplanes already bomb ISIS targets in

Syria, and could quickly shift their aim to pro-Assad forces.

Canada's seat at the table has been secured through its services rendered in the US-led military operations in the Middle East. In 2014, the Conservative Harper government sent aircraft to join in the bombardment of ISIS targets in Iraq and later Syria. Earlier this year, the Liberal government junked its pose during the election as opponents of the military intervention in Iraq and Syria by tripling the contingent of Canadian Special Forces in the region and increasing soldiers by a third. The Special Forces are playing a central role in northern Iraq in the training of Kurdish peshmerga forces to take back territory controlled by the Islamic State.

A key priority of the Liberal government is the deepening of Canada's strategic partnership with the US so as to project Canadian interests around the world more aggressively. The government is currently sponsoring a defence policy review that is considering a vast expansion in resources for the armed forces and potential deployments of military personnel on virtually every continent. Potential interventions in Libya, Mali and Haiti are already in the works. As well as the Middle East, the Liberals are continuing the Conservative policy of closely integrating Canada with the US in its aggressive drive against Russia in eastern Europe and the Baltic, and in its "pivot" to Asia aimed at preparing for war with China.

Canadian imperialism's interests in the Middle East are closely aligned with those of Washington. Immediately upon taking power, the Trudeau government vowed that there would be no weakening in its staunch support for the Zionist Israeli regime. Unlike its Conservative predecessor, it embraced the Obama administration's nuclear agreement with Iran.

An important section of the ruling elite in Canada is of the opinion that Dion's position at the talks was secured by the determination of the Trudeau government to press ahead with a C\$15 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia in the face

of widespread public opposition. The agreement, which will supply light armoured vehicles to the absolutist dictatorship with one of the worst human rights records in the world, was initiated by the Conservatives but had to be approved and signed off by Dion earlier this year.

Pressure mounted on the government two weeks ago when the *Globe* published footage of Saudi forces using similar vehicles to those that Canada will ship in the suppression of Shia regime opponents in the Al-Qatif region.

Armoured vehicles have also been used by the US-backed Saudi forces, which have been waging a murderous war in Yemen for more than a year. In the course of the conflict, thousands of civilians have been killed and millions forced from their homes in what was already the region's poorest country.

The military vehicles, which are capable of carrying small cannons or machine guns, are being shipped by Canada to a regime which is also one of the most aggressive advocates for an all-out war for regime change against the Assad regime—a policy that could quickly spiral into a broader regional war drawing in the US and its allies on one side and Russia on the other. Adel al-Jubair, the Saudi foreign minister, commented at the Vienna talks last week, “The choice about moving to an alternative plan, the choice about intensifying the military support [to the opposition] is entirely with the Bashar regime. ... He will be removed, either through a political process or through military force.”

Such risks are, however, from the standpoint of Canadian imperialist interests, worth taking. Michael Bell, who served as Canadian ambassador to a number of Middle Eastern countries and advised Trudeau on foreign policy prior to the election, enthused that Dion's inclusion at the ISSG was “recognition of the government's resolve to play a significant role on the world scene.” He claimed that the Liberals were reviving the “multilateral” traditions of Lester Pearson by pursuing a policy of “constructive intervention.” The desire for a more active role in multilateral institutions, which served over the years to enable Canada as a lesser imperialist power to project its interests around the globe, led a large section of the ruling elite last year to back the return to power of the Liberals, the Canadian bourgeoisie's preferred party of government for much of the last century and the party most closely associated with the multilateral tradition.

Lest anyone harbour any illusions about the character of this new engagement, Bell wrote of the “murky world of international relations,” before getting to his main point, “One has to get one's hands dirty and engage with, and persuade, those whose power and influence determine outcomes.”

Bell insisted that this be undertaken with Saudi Arabia as

an ally. After rejecting any criticism of the government's actions, he went on to assert that the “most important” reason for sticking to the arms deal was “the consequences, in a world of political hardball, for the Arabian peninsula of undermining the House of Saud, no matter how repellent its tribal practices.”

Another outspoken ally of the Liberal government's foreign policy has been the arch-conservative Conrad Black. In a comment entitled “Why Canada is justified in selling arms to the Saudis” in the right-wing *National Post*, Black explicitly linked the arms sale to Canada's great power ambitions. “Canada can now decide whether it wants to be one of the world's important powers or not. This does not mean a super power, which is not and will not be on offer for a country of 35 million people. It means a G7 country with the ability to extend its status to be one of world's influential countries beyond economics and including the full range of factors that create a country's stature in the world.”

The sections of the ruling elite that raised concern about Dion's invitation to Vienna attacked him from the right. His seat at the table with the US and Russia had been secured only by toning down criticism of Russian president Vladimir Putin, argued *Globe* columnist Conrad Yakubuski, including among other things by abandoning plans for a law targeting Russian corruption. He went on to worry that this could compromise Canadian support for the far-right regime in Ukraine, which continues to wage a civil war against pro-Russian separatists in the east.

The Trudeau government has continued the firm support extended to Kiev by its Conservative predecessor. Around 200 Canadian troops are currently in western Ukraine training military personnel, and Dion has vowed to implement a free trade agreement between the two countries. Trudeau is reportedly planning an official visit to Ukraine this summer.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact