

Canada's defence minister tours Africa to lay groundwork for military intervention

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Canadian Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan confirmed Monday that Justin Trudeau's Liberal government will soon announce a major military deployment to one or more African countries.

Speaking to Canadian press by teleconference from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Sajjan said the Canadian Armed Forces' intervention in Africa will be "for a long-duration."

Over eight days, Sajjan had travelled to Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, and the DRC on a fact-finding mission. He was accompanied by Romeo Dallaire, a retired Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Lieutenant-General and well-known proponent of "humanitarian" military interventions, and Louise Arbour, a former Supreme Court justice, prosecutor for the International Court and head of the International Crisis Group.

Behind claims of a Canadian "reengagement" with United Nations' peacekeeping missions, the Trudeau Liberal government is preparing to wage war on the African continent in order to bolster Canadian imperialist interests. Canadian military officials have already indicated that up to a thousand troops and warplanes could be deployed to one or more countries, with potential locations including Mali, the Central African Republic, and the DRC.

In each of the aforementioned three countries, Canadian troops would be involved in counterinsurgency warfare. In Mali, France, under the guise of a UN peacekeeping mission, is mounting a neocolonial intervention in support of a government fighting Islamist separatists in the country's north. Since April, more than a hundred UN "peacekeepers" have been killed in Mali. In the Central African Republic and the Congo shaky western-supported governments are embroiled in civil wars.

Sajjan is expected to soon make a recommendation to cabinet as to where Canadian troops will be deployed in Africa, with a public announcement slated to take place ahead of a UN peacekeeping summit in London next month.

The Africa deployment is being planned and implemented in the midst of a full government defence policy review, the first in more than two decades. The review is being used by the Liberals, the corporate media, and military-security establishment to push for major hikes in military spending, the further militarization of the Arctic, Canada's participation in the US anti-ballistic missile shield, and the procurement of a

vast array of new weapons, including advanced fighter jets, a flotilla of war ships, and armed drones.

Chief of Defence Staff General Jonathan Vance indicated the advanced state of the preparations for the Africa deployment when he declared last month that a major CAF deployment to Africa would be taking place "very soon."

In an interview from Ethiopia with the *Globe and Mail*, Sajjan sought to prepare the public for Canadian troops waging war. He said that it was a misnomer to call the coming African deployment a peacekeeping mission, saying it would be better to describe it as a "peace support operation." "I think," continued Sajjan, "we can definitely say what we used to have as peacekeeping ... is no longer. We don't have two parties that have agreed on peace and there's a peacekeeping force in between."

The *Globe and Mail*, *National Post* and prominent commentators on military affairs have been urging the government to "level" with Canadians and warn them the coming CAF intervention in Africa will be difficult and involve fierce combat and casualties. Many have cited Canada's role in Afghanistan, where the CAF waged a brutal counterinsurgency war for seven years in support of the US-NATO occupation of the impoverished Central Asian country, as providing ideal experience for the upcoming Africa mission.

However, the Liberal government has thus far sought to encourage illusions about Canada's supposed natural vocation as a peacekeeper, to avoid arousing deep popular opposition to militarism and war. During last year's election campaign, Trudeau cynically used the issue of "peacekeeping" to contrast his Liberals from Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative government, which had promoted a bellicose Canadian nationalism, and cast the country as a "warrior nation."

After becoming prime minister, Trudeau made a point of visiting United Nations' headquarters in New York to pledge Ottawa's reengagement with the UN, and launch a bid for a seat on the UN Security Council, which becomes vacant in 2021.

It is thoroughly dishonest to portray Canada as a force for "peace," and the Cold War "peacekeeping" missions mounted by successive Canadian governments as anything other than a

defence of the interests of the imperialist powers in some of the most impoverished and conflict-ridden regions of the world.

Canadian imperialism was a major belligerent in both of the imperialist world wars of the last century, and throughout the Cold War the bulk of Canada's military forces were involved in the US' preparations for war with the Soviet Union. Beginning with the 1956 Suez crisis, Canada, with US encouragement and blessing, did play a prominent role in UN peacekeeping missions. Such missions were used to defuse crises, particularly those like Cyprus and Suez that threatened to destabilize, if not tear apart, NATO. Canada used such missions to gain international leverage and to cultivate the image of an "honest broker" working to stabilize international relations as part of refurbished liberal Canadian nationalism that was used to contain social opposition at home and bind working people to establishment politics.

The Canadian bourgeoisie shifted its strategy dramatically in the wake of the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Over the past quarter century, Canada, under Liberal and Conservative governments alike, has participated in every major US war and military intervention, with the sole exception of the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Currently, Canada is playing a significant role in all three of Washington's major military-strategic offensives: the Mideast war aimed at consolidating US hegemony over the world's most important oil-producing region; the military encirclement of Russia in Eastern Europe and the Baltic; and the economic, diplomatic and military campaign to isolate, encircle and prepare for war against China.

It therefore comes as no surprise that Ottawa's plans in Africa are being closely coordinated with US imperialism. As Sajjan's trip began, it was publicly revealed for the first time that Canadian Special Forces have been operating in Niger providing training to the West African country's special forces for the past three years. This relationship almost certainly arose out of the CAF's participation in the Operation Flintlock exercise the US African Command has mounted in Niger and other West African countries since 2011. Sajjan is reportedly considering replacing the Special Forces troops now deployed in Niger, a land-locked country rich in uranium and other resources, with regular CAF soldiers.

The Canadian government has no qualms about collaborating with the most ruthless regimes. While in Addis Ababa, Sajjan pledged increased cooperation with the Ethiopian armed forces. He praised Ethiopia's role in the Horn of Africa, where it has served as a key ally of US imperialism by deploying troops to Somalia to combat Islamist forces and prop up the pro-US regime in Mogadishu.

Predictably, Sajjan had nothing to say regarding the Ethiopian government's recent brutal suppression of protests. According to Amnesty International, government forces opened fire on anti-regime protesters in several cities earlier this month, killing 97 people.

The pledge to step up military cooperation with Ethiopia, which has one of Africa's largest militaries, comes just months after Sajjan travelled to Cairo and pledged increased military-security collaboration with the bloody Egyptian dictatorship of General Sisi.

Since 2013, Canada has repeatedly provided logistical support to French troops in Mali, deploying military transport planes to ferry in equipment and supplies. Last fall, when Paris, under Operation Barkhane, expanded France's military operations across their former colonial possessions in western and central Africa, including Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger, CAF aircraft were again enlisted to transport French troops and supplies.

The Liberals' pretence that their interest in African "peacekeeping" is motivated by altruism is further exposed when one considers the substantial commercial interests corporate Canada has in Africa, and especially in the countries identified as the most likely destinations for CAF troops.

Canada is a global player in the mining industry, with more than 55 percent of the world's publicly-traded mining companies listed on the Toronto stock exchange.

In Mali, Canadian-based Iamgold is one of the two principal owners of the country's largest gold mine and total Canadian mining investments were estimated by Ottawa in 2014 at more than \$1 billion. Canadian big business is also hoping that the Canada-Mali Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (FIPPA), which came into force in June, will increase its opportunities for plundering the country's human and natural resources. Ottawa has pursued FIPPAs with a number of African countries to ensure that their governments can't interfere with Canadian corporate interests and so as to encourage "structural adjustment" (that is privatization and the slashing of public services) and deregulation.

The DRC is the third most important destination for Canadian mining investment in Africa, reportedly accounting for \$3 billion of the approximately \$30 billion Canadian miners have invested in the continent. Canadian companies have been accused of profiting from the looting of Congolese resources that occurred after troops from Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi entered the country in 1998. A UN report in 2002 specifically named nine Canadian-based mining companies for having breached Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development rules in their African operations.



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