

Canada to partner with France in waging war in Africa

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24 October 2016

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau pledged his Liberal government will dramatically expand its collaboration with France in military interventions in Africa, during a visit by French Prime Minister Manuel Valls to Canada earlier this month.

While Valls held discussions with Trudeau and senior government leaders on a range of issues, including the Canada-EU trade agreement, the main purpose of Valls' trip was to finalize plans for Canada's participation in French-led counter-insurgency operations in former French colonies in West and Central Africa.

The two leaders agreed to renew the Canada-France Enhanced Cooperation Agenda, which under a "humanitarian" cloak will see Canadian troops join the French army's neocolonial missions on the impoverished continent. Although this was Valls' first visit to Canada since he became prime minister, the talks on Franco-Canadian cooperation in Africa are far advanced.

As part of its "reengagement" with UN peacekeeping missions, Canada announced in September that it will deploy 600 soldiers and 150 police officers to one or more African countries and spend \$450 million on "peace support projects." During a tour of Africa last August to prepare for Canadian military deployments, Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan said the Canadian Armed Forces' intervention on the continent will be "for a long-duration."

While Trudeau has not yet specified what countries Canadian troops will deploy to, Mali and the Central African Republic are considered the most likely targets. However, Valls made clear that Canada's support would also be welcome in other countries, including Niger and Burkina Faso.

Canadian Defence officials recently confirmed that planning is well underway for Canada to deploy military transport aircraft to move French troops and equipment in five countries: Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad.

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has been increasingly involved in West Africa since France sent troops to Mali in

2013. With the support of the then NDP official opposition, the Harper Conservative government deployed military transport planes to ferry in French weaponry and supplies. Last year, Canadian heavy-lift Globemaster military aircraft carried nearly 40 tonnes of equipment between France and Africa to support Paris' drive to pacify its former colonial possessions.

It was recently revealed that the CAF has also been operating in Niger for the past three years, providing training to that country's special forces. France has long exploited Niger's abundant uranium reserves. The impoverished landlocked country has also become of increasing interest to Washington, which, through the US military's African Command (Africom), has developed a growing presence. As well as training troops in Niger, Canadian soldiers have cooperated with their US colleagues since 2011 in operation Flintlock, an Africom-led mission to train special forces from countries including Mali, Mauritania, Chad, Senegal and Nigeria.

The CAF's involvement in Africa is part of Canada's shift to a more aggressive foreign policy. Behind its "democratic" facade, the Trudeau government is pursuing the same aggressive foreign agenda on behalf of Canadian imperialism as did the hated Conservative government of Stephen Harper.

With the sole exception of the 2003 Iraq War, Canada has joined every one of the major wars the US has launched over the past quarter-century. Canada is now deeply implicated in Washington's three principal military-strategic offensives—in the oil-rich Middle East and against Russia and China. These criminal enterprises have already set entire regions aflame and destroyed millions of lives, while increasing the risk of a direct confrontation between the US and the world's second and fourth largest nuclear powers, Russia and China.

Defence Minister Sajjan has himself made clear that the government's "peacekeeping" rhetoric is a fig-leaf to dupe the public into acquiescing to Canada's participation in war. Speaking of the task Canada would be called to play in

Africa, Sajjan recently said he preferred the term “peace support operations” to “peacekeeping.” Because “what we used to have as peacekeeping, before, is no longer. We don’t have two parties that have agreed on peace and there’s a peacekeeping force in between.”

In reality, what Sajjan and the Liberal government mean by this is that Canada will be waging counter-insurgency warfare along the lines of the role the CAF played in the neocolonial occupation of Afghanistan from 2005 to 2011.

During his visit, Valls praised the Canadian Armed Forces as “a very professional army” and declared that “generally, we need a strong and active Canada in the world.” The French premier also claimed that Canada and France confronted the same “terrorism which has struck our two societies—the crises that are shaking Africa and the Middle East and which affect our security”.

The “war on terror” invoked by Valls is a fraud. Since 2001 the Western powers have used it to justify wars and military interventions across Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa and to justify sweeping attacks on democratic rights at home.

French imperialism has promoted this narrative to justify the reassertion of its dominance over its resource-rich former African colonies, while also intervening aggressively in the Middle East in support of the US regime change operation in Syria.

Paris is eager for military collaboration with Canada, which—through its ties with the US’s Africom, its leading role in the Francophonie, and its global mining companies—has developed extensive interests in West and Central Africa.

Under Operation Barkhane, France is mounting military interventions in Mali and the Central African Republic, involving 12,000 and 13,000 troops respectively. Most of the troops are from neighbouring African states, but German, Dutch and Swedish forces are also involved.

Trudeau is using the same demagogic “anti-terror” rhetoric to justify Canada’s role in the US-led war in the Middle East and the impending African deployment. In this, the Liberals have picked up seamlessly from where the right-wing Conservatives under Harper left off.

The “peacekeeping” missions Canada is readying to join in Africa are in reality all counter-insurgency operations that aim at sustaining in power servile, pro-Western governments who are embroiled in civil wars.

The insurgency movements in those countries, as in the Middle East, are the direct result of the imperialist powers use of Islamist militias to oust regimes deemed hostile to the West and their promotion of communal and ethnic divisions as part of a “divide and rule” strategy. In the case of Mali, Islamist and Tuareg rebels who were armed and financed by

NATO to oust the Gaddafi regime in Libya in 2011 went to Mali after the war and launched a rebellion against the Bamako government.

Canada is determined to expand its role in the imperialist carve-up of Africa because Canadian big business has billions of dollars in investments on the continent, above all in the mining industry. Canadian mining companies have invested at least \$25 billion in Africa, including \$3 billion in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In Mali, Canadian-based Iamgold is one of the two principal owners of the country’s largest gold mine with investments worth \$1 billion. Canadian companies have reaped massive profits from the rich resources in Congo, including by seizing on the chaos provoked by the war which engulfed the country and much of the region between 1998 and 2003.

The Liberals are said to be considering the possibility of sending additional troops to join a UN mission in the DRC, where a small contingent of nine Canadian servicemen is already operating.

When the Trudeau government first announced its plans to revive the CAF’s participation in “peacekeeping” missions, a section of the Canadian ruling elite led by the *National Post* and *Globe and Mail* expressed skepticism. This was bound up with their concern that the references to “peacekeeping” would fuel popular opposition to the military deployments when it became clear that the Canadian military was in reality prosecuting war.

Sajjan’s bellicose talk of “peace support missions” and open acknowledgment that this amounts to counter-insurgency warfare, the government’s readiness to partner with French imperialism, and the substantial interests of Canadian corporations on the African continent appear to have persuaded the *Globe* to express itself more forthrightly in support of Canada intervening militarily in Africa.

During Valls’ visit, the *Globe* published an editorial in which it argued that working with the experienced French army in Africa would serve Canada’s interest and that sending 600 troops would be a good start. The editorial concluded, “If the contingent works well, there may be a case for sending more Canadian troops.”



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