

Canada's plans to wage war in Africa take shape

Laurent Lafrance
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For the second time in less than four months, Canadian Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan has travelled to West Africa with a view to finalizing plans for Canada's participation in French and US-led counter-insurgency warfare on the continent.

As part of his latest "fact-finding" mission, Sajjan visited Mali and Senegal, countries that could see the deployment of some of the 600 soldiers and 150 police officers the Trudeau Liberal government is to send to Africa as part of what it is touting as a renewed commitment to UN "peacekeeping" missions. Other options include Central African countries such as the war-ravaged Democratic Republic of Congo or the Central African Republic.

While not confirming the countries where Canadian soldiers will be deployed, Sajjan told the *Toronto Star* upon his return that Canada has committed to operate in several countries and with an engagement of at least three years in each case.

Sajjan's trip to Mali took place only weeks after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau met French Premier Manuel Valls and pledged Canada would dramatically expand its partnership with Paris in military interventions in former French colonies in West and Central Africa.

Speaking at a town hall session before 300 high school students last week to mark the Liberals' first year in office, Trudeau and Sajjan used a mixture of "humanitarian" and "anti-terror" demagogic to promote the soon-to-be-announced African military interventions and obscure the real imperialist goals that lie behind them.

Trudeau declared it was necessary to tackle "the root cause" of the problems in the region. "Canada," he said, "has an awful lot to offer other than just stopping people from shooting at each other," though doing so is "important and one of the first things that we want to do." Sajjan said Canada will strive to "empower" African youth, "instead of them being radicalized and going into

other groups."

In reality, Canada's mission in Africa has nothing to do with the well-being of the African people. Quite the contrary. Canada's ruling elite is determined to join French and American imperialism's drive to dominate the resource-rich continent through violent means because it has developed extensive economic and financial interests in West and Central Africa, most of all in exploiting these regions' abundant mineral wealth.

During the *Star* interview, Sajjan once again made clear that "peacekeeping" is only a subterfuge and that Canada is effectively preparing to wage all-out war. "This is not the peacekeeping of the past," said the Defence Minister. "[W]e need to look at what the challenges are of today and develop the peace operations for today's challenges."

Senator Daniel Lang, chair of the Senate committee on national security and defence, shed more light on the real character of Canada's impending "humanitarian" military intervention in Africa. Following discussions at UN headquarters, Lang said, "It was clearly put to us that these countries and these regions...are undergoing such terrible devastation and political turmoil and violence, [that it will require] a 10- to 20-year commitment." Lang added that Canada was asked to provide significant military equipment, including armored vehicles, helicopters and other airlift capabilities.

The missions Trudeau pledged to join are all counter-insurgency operations aimed at propping up pro-Western governments that are facing armed rebellion by Islamist forces or regionally based militants. Mali is a case in point. Following the destruction of Libya by the Western powers in 2011, Tuareg militias, supported by Islamists who had been armed by NATO to oust the Gaddafi regime, were able to seize large quantities of Libyan weaponry and launch an uprising in northern Mali against the central government in Bamako.

France responded by deploying troops at the beginning

of 2013 to reconquer Mali's resource-rich north. The intervention was sold to the public as a counter-terrorist mission. In truth, it is part of a new scramble for Africa, through which all the major powers are seeking to gain control over resources, markets and strategic countries.

As part of its two-year-old Operation Barkhane, France now has more than 3,000 troops stationed in Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad. Canadian defence officials recently confirmed that planning is well underway for Canada to send military transport aircraft to move French troops in those five countries.

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has become increasingly involved in West Africa. Since 2011, Canadian soldiers have joined US forces in Operation Flintlock, a US Africa Command-led mission to train Special Forces from West and Central African states. Last year, Canadian heavy-lift Globemaster military aircraft carried nearly 40 tons of French military equipment between France and Africa.

Not long ago, the *Globe and Mail* expressed concern that the Liberals' decision to send "peacekeeping" troops to Africa could take away from Canada's supportive role in various US military-strategic offensives. But Canada's "newspaper of record" recently published an editorial voicing support for a deployment to Senegal as a first step to greater Canadian involvement in Africa. Among other things, Senegal is seen as providing a valuable base for supporting interventions elsewhere, including in Mali.

Apart from Mali and Senegal, the Liberals are considering increasing Canada's military presence in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where a small contingent of nine Canadian servicemen is already operating. Canadian mining companies have invested about C\$3 billion in DRC's mining sector in recent years and have garnered huge profits from the impoverished country. Canadian companies seized on the chaos provoked by the war that engulfed the Congo and much of the region between 1998 and 2003 to rake in millions.

The *Toronto Star*, which reviewed nearly 1,000 pages of heavily redacted documents, published an article last month that provided an unusually frank admission of the lucrative economic interests in DRC that lie behind Ottawa's interest in mounting a "peacekeeping" mission there. The article revealed some of the discussions that took place at the highest levels of the Harper Conservative government in 2010, when the UN requested Canada to take leadership of its Congo "peacekeeping" mission.

The article cited Andrew Leslie, then the commander of Canada's army and now the Liberal "Whip" in the House

of Commons. Leslie told the *Star* that key arguments in favor of Canada intervening militarily in the Congo were "the extensive business interests of the Canadian mining industry, and the fact that China was increasingly influential in the country." Leslie added that another factor was concern that instability in the region could help recruiting by al-Qaida.

The Canadian military was eager to take charge of the UN's DRC force, believing it had sufficient resources to conduct a mission and seeing it as means of putting to use the "skills" it had developed through its leading role in the neo-colonial, Afghan counter-insurgency war.

Deepak Obhrai, who was at that time parliamentary secretary to Harper's minister of foreign affairs, said the government finally chose not to send troops to the Congo because supporting government forces guilty of widespread human rights abuses would have been politically "disastrous" for the Conservatives. The government decided instead to offer logistical support to African Union Forces, which did the dirty work.

Remarks by an official who spoke to the *Star* on condition of anonymity further revealed the imperialist ambitions of Canada in Africa when he said that the missions in the impoverished continent would be similar to the recent deployments to Iraq and Ukraine, where the CAF is providing arms and training local forces.

Those two missions are part of the broader US drive to impose its hegemony on the entire Eurasian landmass and thwart and subjugate its main rivals, above all Russia and China. Canada, which over the past quarter-century has joined one US-led war after another, is playing a leading role in both NATO's military mobilization on Russia's borders and Washington's anti-China "Pivot to Asia."



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