

Canada's Liberal government extends participation in Mideast war to 2019

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Without a parliamentary debate, let alone a vote, Justin Trudeau's Liberal government announced last Thursday the extension and expansion of Canada's involvement in the US-led Mideast war. The decision means that up to 850 Canadian military personnel will continue to operate in Iraq and Kuwait until the end of March 2019, assisting Washington in its reckless drive to secure unbridled dominance over the energy-rich Middle East.

The new deployment gives Chief of Defence Staff General Jonathan Vance the latitude to decide the composition of the 850-strong military force that will operate in the region. The military will also be able to determine where the forces operate and with whom. Some 200 Special Forces troops, scores of war-planning and intelligence personnel, 50 medical staff, and hundreds of members of the Royal Canadian Air Force have been engaged in the conflict since the Liberals' March 2016 expansion of the Middle East intervention the Stephen Harper-led Conservative government launched in September 2014.

The deployment includes surveillance and refueling aircraft that operate over Syria as well as Iraq and military helicopters. A Hercules transport plane is now to be added.

Canada's role in the latest US-led war in the Middle East is aimed both at strengthening its alliance with Washington, far and away its most important economic and military-security partner, and ensuring Ottawa has a "seat at the table" in the reordering of the region.

While touted as a war against ISIS, the current war arises out of the series of wars that US imperialism has waged in the Middle East since 1991 and has as its principal aim the overthrow of Syria's Russian- and Iranian-backed regime.

Washington's bloody military operations have blown up whole societies, killing millions, rendered millions more refugees, and fanned the flames of ethno-religious sectarianism, fueling tensions between regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Canada's expanded military presence in Iraq will only intensify the already explosive ethnic tensions in the country. Significantly, the new deployment allows for

Canadian forces not only to continue their support of Kurdish Peshmerga fighters, but also to collaborate with Iraqi government forces. Many of its Shia-dominated units have been accused by aid and human rights groups like Amnesty International of systematic and widespread human rights abuses and atrocities during the recapture of Mosul, including torture, extra-judicial executions and the forced displacement of villagers. The Canadian military and government have turned a blind-eye to similar crimes perpetrated by the Peshmerga.

With ISIS territory in Iraq rapidly being recaptured, bitter feuds between warring sectarian camps could well ignite a wider conflict. The oil-rich region around Mosul, which was predominantly a Sunni city prior to the Iraqi offensive, has become the target of Shiite forces keen to extend their influence and Kurdish militia animated by the prospect of an independent Kurdistan.

Recognizing that there is little public support for Canada becoming embroiled in a Mideast war, especially one that threatens to ignite a conflict between the major powers, Trudeau's Liberals did everything they could to bury their announcement that the Canadian Armed Forces' mission in the Middle East is being extended to the end of March 2019. The announcement was made in a press statement released after parliament had risen for the summer and at the beginning of the Canada Day holiday weekend.

The expansion of Canada's military intervention in the Middle East comes just three weeks after the Liberal government released its new defence policy. It pledges that the government will increase military spending by more than 70 percent over the next decade to close to \$33 billion per year. The additional funds will be used to increase the number of military personnel and purchase new equipment, including a fleet of 88 fighter aircraft, 15 new warships and armed drones.

The Liberals, whose were promoted by the trade unions and various pseudo-left groups as a "progressive" alternative to Harper and his Conservatives, have sought to cloak this major military build-up behind a wave of propaganda about

Canada's "diversity" and commitment to "democracy" and "human rights." In a speech delivered a day prior to the unveiling of the spending hike, Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland claimed that these "Canadian values" have to be defended with "hard power," i.e., war. In a similar vein, the new defence policy includes commitments to strengthen the "diversity" of the armed forces by increasing the percentage of women serving from 15 to 25 percent over the next decade and intensifying efforts to recruit "visible minorities" including First Nations people and immigrants.

Behind such rhetoric, the Liberals' are seeking to ensure that Canadian imperialism has the means to aggressively assert its predatory interests around the globe. As it is, Canada is deeply implicated in the three principal military-strategic offensives of the US—in the Middle East and against Russia and China.

Earlier in June, the Liberals quietly revealed plans to expand the mandate of the Canadian Armed Forces' training mission in Ukraine. Since 2015 and, as of the recent government announcement, until 2019, 200 Canadian soldiers are deployed to Ukraine to train army and National Guard units to fight pro-Russian separatists in the east. Under guidelines announced in June, the Canadian troops will be allowed to deploy anywhere in Ukraine, apart from Russian border areas and the frontline of the fighting, a move that significantly expands the operational area of Canadian forces and increases the likelihood of their becoming involved in combat.

Canadian forces also took center stage last month at a ceremony in Latvia to mark the commencement of operations by one of NATO's four new "forward deployed" battalions on Russia's border. Four hundred and fifty Canadian troops are providing the command and basic infrastructure for the Latvian-based battalion, while the United States, Britain and Germany are leading similar forces in Estonia, Lithuania and Poland.

The predatory character of Canada's participation in the imperialist carve-up of the Middle East was underscored late last month when the political and media establishment united as one to praise a Canadian sniper who reportedly shot an ISIS militant from a distance of 3.5 kilometers. As media outlets, including the state-funded CBC, breathlessly competed to outdo each other with reports that a Canadian now held the "record" for the longest "kill shot" anywhere in the world, Trudeau told reporters that the action was "something to be celebrated."

This explodes the Liberals' bogus claim that Canada is no longer involved in "combat" operations in Iraq. In reality, the reorganization of Ottawa's military forces that Trudeau announced in early 2016, including the withdrawal of Canada's six CF-18 fighter jets, resulted in Canada

becoming even more deeply implicated in the fighting. Last November, Vance acknowledged to a parliamentary committee that the Special Forces deployed to Iraq spend much of their time on or close to the front line of fighting, advising and assisting the Peshmerga, and that in certain circumstances they are authorized to initiate fighting.

Canadian troops have since entered the city of Mosul, the target of an onslaught over recent months by US-backed Iraqi forces that has claimed the lives of thousands of civilians.

The lack of any opposition from within the political establishment to the disgusting outpouring of enthusiasm for Canadian military violence shows that all of the major parties are fully behind the war drive. Responding to news of the sniper's achievement, New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Thomas Mulcair said it was appropriate to laud the prowess of the Canadian military, but Trudeau had gone too far in urging Canadians to celebrate the death of another human being.

The NDP has endorsed every Canadian imperialist military intervention over the past two decades, from the 1999 bombing of Yugoslavia and the Afghan War, to the 2004 intervention into Haiti to depose the country's elected president and the NATO regime-change war in Libya.

The NDP has no fundamental objection to the current deployment in the Middle East. While the party voted against the initial intervention, it supports Canada being part of the US-led Mideast war coalition and accepts the premise that Canadian military forces should be active in Iraq and Syria. The NDP merely urges that they be used to undertake "humanitarian" activities, language which has been used to justify every imperialist atrocity since the 1990s.

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