# Trudeau defends Canada's $15 billion arms deal with despotic Saudi regime

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Justin Trudeau's Liberal government is continuing to defend Canada's $15 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia, even as new information reveals the murderous character of the military equipment Ottawa is shipping to Riyadh.

A recent report from CBC, based on documents it obtained, outlined for the first time specifics of the Canadian-Saudi arms deal that had previously been sealed under a confidentiality accord.

The $15 billion deal was initially approved by the former Conservative government in 2014, but was given the go-ahead when the Liberals signed export permits that allowed the sale to proceed. Trudeau and his Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, Stephane Dion, were caught out lying about the deal, which they claimed had been finalized by the previous government. It was subsequently revealed that the Harper Conservatives only signed permits to authorize the provision of technical details about the light armoured vehicles (LAV) to be sold. The delivery was only able to proceed after Dion signed permits stating that the sale conformed with Canada's arms control and human rights policies.

Just like Dion, who fraudulently claimed that "there is no reasonable risk that the military equipment might be used against the civilian population," Trudeau recently told the House of Commons that "permits are only approved if the exports are consistent with our foreign and defence policies, including human rights."

While Trudeau boasted of "new processes of transparency and accountability to international sales," his government is refusing to release details of a recent investigation by Global Affairs Canada staff into allegations that Canadian-made armoured vehicles were used by the Saudi regime in the protracted military conflict against the Shiite population in Al-Qatif, a hotbed of popular resistance to the Saudi regime.

Even though the Saudi embassy in Canada publicly stated that Riyadh has used Canadian-made armaments to suppress its own people in Qatif, current Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland declared that the Global Affairs report found "no conclusive evidence that Canadian-made vehicles were used in human rights violations." Freeland refused to make the investigation public precisely because its findings could fuel public opposition and put the lucrative deal in jeopardy.

Both the Liberals and Conservatives exploited the lack of detail about the deal to lie to the public about the capabilities of the vehicles being sold. While former prime minister Stephen Harper absurdly described them as "trucks," Trudeau no less disingenuously called them "jeeps."

The documents obtained by CBC show that the 2014 agreement, to both Harper's and Trudeau's knowledge, called for the sale of 928 of the newly developed LAV 6s, including 119 with "heavy assault" 105-millimetre cannons. Another 119 are configured as "anti-tank" vehicles and a further 119 are designated as "direct fire" support, with a two-man turret and 30-millimetre chain gun. The remaining vehicles include ambulances, mobile command posts, VIP transports and recovery vehicles equipped with cranes. Almost 40 percent—354 of the total—are standard troop carriers.

According to the CBC , the documents also reveal that the contract goes far beyond the sale of the vehicles. It also includes "a 14-year support program that involves ammunition, crew 'training in Canada/Europe' and 'embedded' maintenance, with a fleet management team in 13 workshops located in Saudi Arabia." The training of Saudi crews working on the gun system is supposed to take place in France.

Canada's steadfast backing for the murderous Saudi

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regime is part of its efforts to aggressively pursue its predatory imperialist interests throughout the Middle East. In Syria, Canada is involved in providing support to the US-backed Islamist rebels engaged in a war for regime change against Bashar al-Assad. Trudeau rushed to applaud last month's reckless missile strikes by the US, France and Britain on Syria, parroting the unsubstantiated claims that Assad used chemical weapons.

Canadian imperialist ambitions are closely bound up with the maintenance of the United States' unchallenged hegemony over the strategically important Middle East. For this reason, the Trudeau government is fully behind Washington's efforts to construct an anti-Iranian alliance in close collaboration with their regional allies Israel and Saudi Arabia, as part of advanced preparations for all-out war with Tehran. In Syria, this has seen US-backed rebels seize strategically-important areas in eastern Syria to prevent Iran establishing a land corridor to Damascus, while Israel has been given a free hand by Washington to target Iranian personnel in a series of air strikes that threaten to trigger a wider war.

The House of Saud has been the main pillar of US imperialist hegemony in the Arab world and, along with other reactionary Sunni sheikhdoms and Israel, has been massively financed and armed to fight Iranian influence over the Middle East. Saudi Arabia's genocidal war in Yemen has claimed tens of thousands of civilian lives and left much of the country in ruins.

Despite the fact that the massacre of thousands of innocent civilians and the blockade imposed by Saudi Arabia on Yemen—which aims at starving its population and the Houthi rebels—has been broadly condemned as a major violation of human rights, the Trudeau government is proceeding with its arms deal undeterred.

There can be no doubt that the arms sold to Saudi Arabia will be used in Riyadh's war against Yemen, one of the world's poorest countries.

Canada's backing for the brutal Saudi dictatorship is endorsed by the entire political establishment. During the 2015 election campaign, when New Democratic Party leader Thomas Mulcair sought to feign outrage at the agreement so as to cynically appeal to popular anti-war sentiments, the Unifor trade union quickly brought him to heel and demanded that Canada's social democrats avoid raising the Saudi arms deal for the rest of the campaign. The NDP, which has backed every Canadian imperialist military intervention since the bombing of Yugoslavia, duly obliged.

The Saudi arms deal provides yet another demonstration of the fact that, like its Conservative predecessors, Trudeau's Liberals are determined to advance Canada's imperialist interests through the deepening of Ottawa's military-strategic partnership with US imperialism. The policies of the Trudeau government, which is committed to hike military spending by 70 percent over the next decade, are creating the conditions for more death and destruction in the Middle East and beyond.

Canada's Armed Forces are already fully implicated with the US military in the Middle East. In addition to backing Jihadist forces in Syria against Assad, the Liberal government has tripled the deployment of Canadian Special Forces to Iraq to help maintain a pro-Western government after years of US-led war. Canada also played a major role in the 2011 regime-change operation in Libya, which killed thousands and left the country in ruins.

Ottawa is a strong backer of Israel in its repression of defenceless Palestinians. Trudeau has picked up from where Harper left off on his policy towards Israel, siding with the building of Israeli settlements on Palestinian land. The Liberal government also collaborates closely with the Egyptian dictatorship of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, whose regime has massacred and jailed thousands of political opponents.

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