

Harper's Conservatives promote military ties to Israel

Written by Joan Russow

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By Yves engler May 10, 2013 · 11:32 While the Harper Conservative government has loudly proclaimed its close ties to Israel, most Canadians would be surprised to learn the Tories have decided to make the two countries blood brothers. In the international affairs equivalent of a Mafia initiation ceremony Canada has sworn undying loyalty and to be a faithful soldier in Israel's cause.

Think that's an exaggeration? Consider the following:

- Since Stephen Harper took office the two nations defence ministers and top generals have repeatedly visited each other's country. These visits have resulted in various accords and "the [two] countries have agreed to exchange secret defense information," according to a June 2012 CBC summary of government briefing notes.

- The week before last the head of Canadian Forces visited Israel to deepen "cooperation between the two militaries." Reportedly, Thomas Lawson met his Israeli counterpart, the Defense Minister and various other senior military officers. According to a Jerusalem Post summary, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon called for Canada and Israel to "further increase their cooperation in the fight against terror in light of the upheaval in the Middle East and Iran's role in fueling the region's conflicts."

- In 2008 Canada and Israel signed a wide-ranging public security agreement and for the first time in its history in 2011 Israel named a defense attaché to Ottawa. Until at least the end of 2010 the Canadian embassy in Tel Aviv served as Israel's Contact Point Embassy to NATO, the military alliance of Western nations. The embassy served as the liaison between Israel and NATO, assisting with visits of NATO officials to Israel. According to internal government documents examined by The Dominion, Ottawa worked to strengthen Israel's partnership with the military alliance, helping its "pursuit of a Status of Forces Agreement, getting access to the NATO Maintenance Supply Agency, [redacted]."

- In February 2010 deputy foreign minister Peter Kent implied that Canada already considered Israel a member of NATO, which operates according to the principle that an attack on any member is considered an attack against all members. Reflecting the alliance's purported principle, Kent said "an attack on Israel would be considered an attack on Canada" and in July 2011 defence minister Peter MacKay reiterated this position privately. According to briefing

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notes uncovered by CBC he told Israel's top military commander, Gabi Ashkenazi that "a threat to Israel is a threat to Canada."

- At the same time as official military relations have intensified there has been an increase in weapons sharing and relations between Israeli and Canadian arms manufacturers. At a November 2011 press conference with his Israeli counterpart defense minister MacKay described the two countries' "growing relations in the defense sector." Among the more significant examples, the Canadian military bought the Israeli-made Heron drone for use in Afghanistan and Israel's Elisra Electronics Systems is working on upgrading a dozen Halifax-class warships.

- Despite the Israeli Defense Force's many human rights violations, many Canadian companies sell weapons directly to Israel. According to a 2009 Coalition to Oppose the Arms Trade report, more than 140 Canadian weapons makers export products to Israel. Last year British Columbia-based MacDonald, Dettwiler and Associates won a \$90+ million contract to supply Israel Aerospace Industries with satellite technology. The December 2011 Washington Report on Middle East Affairs detailed some Canadian military exports to Israel. "Ottawa's Allen Vanguard Corporation provides 'counterterrorist' equipment and training. iMPath Networks of Ottawa and Halifax design solutions for real-time video surveillance and intrusion detection technology. Mecachrome Technologies, based in Montréal and Toronto, provides components for military aircraft. And MPB Technologies of Pointe Claire, Edmonton, Airdrie and Calgary manufacturers, among other things, communications equipment and robotics for [Israeli] military use. ... British Columbia-based 360 Surveillance sells technology for Israel's apartheid wall and checkpoints."

- Taxpayers often underwrite ties between Canadian and Israeli military companies. The multimillion dollar Canada-Israel Industrial Research and Development Foundation funds research projects (including many in the "security" field) between the two countries' corporations. (For details see Kole Kilibarda's Canadian and Israeli Defense -Industrial and Homeland Security Ties: An Analysis).

To the extent that the dominant media questions the Harper government's pro-Israel policies they focus on public pronouncements, UN votes and other diplomatic moves such as foreign minister John Baird's recent meeting with Israeli Justice Minister Tzipi Livni in occupied East Jerusalem (a rare occurrence designed to further legitimize Israel's illegal control over that part of the city). But, deepening Canadian security ties with Israel may be more significant than the Conservatives anti-Palestinian public statements and UN votes.

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For instance, what role do growing ties between the two countries' military leadership play in the Conservatives extremely hostile position towards Iran? Or, is there a connection between the Canada Israel public security agreement and the RCMP's highly suspect recent claim that two operatives with "direction and guidance" from "al-Qaeda elements in Iran" planned to blow up a major Canadian bridge? Finally, what role do growing military ties play in spurring the Conservatives' anti-Palestinian diplomatic moves?

Though little discussed, the military is an important element of the Conservatives 'Israel no matter what' policy. In addition to the Jewish establishment, Christian Zionism and the role Israel plays as a Western outpost in the Middle East, the Conservatives militaristic tendencies lead them to support that country. Harper's government, for instance, is close to the Canadian military companies that sell to Israel and do business with that country's top-flight weapons industry. Additionally, Canadian military leaders appreciate the tactical information and expertise Israel's well-practiced military shares.

Like a wanna-be gangster looking up to a Mafia boss, the Harperites are impressed by the large role Israel's military plays in the country's affairs.

Ordinary Canadians should be concerned. Very concerned.

PEJ ADDITION

Something to add since 2007, Canada has not voted in support of a nuclear Arms free Middle East. And at the NPT Conferences, Canada has not joined in with other states in calling upon Israel to ratify the NPT treaty.