

Editorial

The DPRK Has a Right to Defend Itself

Last week the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) tested several missiles, including a long-range missile capable of reaching the United States. Prior to the test the U.S. and Japan warned of dire consequences if the DPRK proceeded with the missile launch, claiming that it was tantamount to an act of aggression. Meanwhile, both the U.S. and Japan have extensive arsenals of long-range missiles which they claim to be for defensive purposes. Furthermore, both countries are guilty of committing acts of aggression against the Korean people, while the DPRK has never committed aggression against another country.

Relations between the U.S. and the DPRK have deteriorated to the point that the DPRK considers it necessary to develop intercontinental ballistic

missiles for deterrence and retaliation against an apprehended attack by the US. This is a symptom of the tensions that have existed on the Korean peninsula for more than half a century. However, despite the constant media barrage that places the blame for this tension at the feet of the DPRK, in reality it is the U.S. alone which is responsible. It is the U.S. which interfered to partition the Korean peninsula at the end of the Second World War and to prevent the holding of democratic elections which would have reunified the country. It is the U.S. which launched an aggression against the DPRK in 1950 leading to the outbreak of the Korean War. Furthermore, it is the U.S. which has refused to sign a peace treaty with the DPRK and which consistently intervenes to sabotage

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For Your Information

The Invasion of Gaza

Using the pretext of the June 25 capture of an Israeli soldier from a military base in the occupied territories, Israel has launched a full-scale military invasion of the Gaza Strip, less than one year after its so-called permanent withdrawal from Gaza. Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) have entered the Gaza Strip in tanks, armoured vehicles and on foot, while IDF fighter planes have been carrying out low-level flights over densely populated areas in Gaza for almost two weeks now. Whatever the stated purpose, the real aim of the Gaza invasion appears to be the destruction of the democratically elected Hamas government, along with civilian infrastructure the Israelis left intact during their unilateral withdrawal. Within 24 hours of launching the invasion, IDF troops had arrested 64 elected Hamas officials in the

West Bank and East Jerusalem, including eight cabinet ministers. These arrests, which the Palestinian government has described as mass kidnappings, amount to the detention of one quarter of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

Several dozen Palestinian civilians have been killed since the invasion of Gaza, dubbed Operation Summer Rain by the IDF, was officially launched on June 27. The deliberate targetting of civilian infrastructure has also plunged the 1.4 million residents of Gaza into a crisis which international observers predict will soon constitute a humanitarian disaster.

Israel's actions in Gaza are in direct violation of the Geneva Conventions, which forbid collective

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The Federal Budget - Part III

(This is the third of a series of articles analyzing the first budget of the Harper Conservative government.)

New Spending Initiatives

The 2006 budget of the Conservative government of Stephen Harper states that it is “committed to reducing growth in spending to a rate that is sustainable”. It has set a target to reduce spending as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from 13.7 percent in 2004-05 to 13.0 percent in 2007-08. It considers this to be a sustainable rate of spending. To put this in perspective, federal spending rose from 16.4 percent of the GDP in 1964-65 to a high of 24 percent in 1984-85. It declined sharply in 1995-96 when federal spending on health, education and social assistance was significantly reduced. The Harper government has set its spending target based on the assumption that the Canadian economy will continue to expand.

The budget confirmed some of the Liberal government’s spending commitments and abandoned others. For example, the budget confirmed the federal-provincial Ten-Year Plan to Strengthen Health Care, and most of the commitments to post-secondary education, housing and public transit laid out in Bill C-48, the so-called Liberal-NDP deal. On the other hand, the Conservative budget rolled back the commitment to Aboriginal communities which were negotiated as part of the Kelowna Accord in November 2005. It is also cancelled the five-year, \$5 billion plan for direct funding of child care spaces and replaced it with a Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) for parents with young children. To help pay for the UCCB, the government will phase out the existing Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) agreements with the provinces.

Security and Defence

The federal government’s spending on infrastructure, security and defence will be increased significantly. In terms of new spending initiatives, excluding the payments for child care benefits, the government will devote 31 percent of its new spending initiatives towards security and defence and 21 percent towards infrastructure. For example, the federal government announced a \$17 billion plan to modernize and beef up the air, land and sea equipment of the Canadian Forces and a plan to add 13,000 regular forces and 10,000 reserve forces. The build-up

of the military is a response to the U.S. demand that its allies like Canada contribute more money, manpower and equipment to U.S.-led wars of aggression around the world. The Conservative government describes this as “strengthening Canada’s role in the world”. These large investments in military equipment will bring super profits to companies such as Boeing.

Infrastructure

The federal government has also devoted \$11.1 billion in new spending for infrastructure renewal over the next five years through the Highways and Border Infrastructure Fund, Border Infrastructure Fund, Pacific Gateway Initiative, Canada Strategic Infrastructure Fund and Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund. Large infrastructure investments were made in the 1950s and 1960s for highways, seaways, airports, railways, hydro-electric dams, nuclear generating stations, water and sewage systems, urban transit, and other infrastructure but these investments have declined over the last three decades. The government is now concerned that the deteriorating quality and insufficient capacity of the infrastructure is interfering with the economic competitiveness of Canadian business and that “a world-class transportation network is required for businesses to bring goods to market both within Canada and abroad”. The biggest part of the infrastructure renewal is devoted towards expanding and upgrading the “gateways” to the United States, which is Canada’s largest trading partner. In 2003, 63 percent of Canada-United States trade in goods was moved by truck which illustrates the importance of the national highway system and border crossings for Canadian business.

Social Services

There is a significant difference between the government’s approach towards spending on infrastructure and its attitude towards social services. In the 1950s and 1960s the government took out loans and plundered the public treasury to provide infrastructure for the monopolies. This is how the federal government originally incurred its huge federal debt. Later, the government sold off these assets to private companies for next to nothing while the Canadian people were left with the debt. Once again

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the federal government is planning to pay for the construction and maintenance of improved infrastructure on behalf of the monopolies. At the same time, little or nothing will be done to improve the water and sewage systems in rural communities and on First Nations reserves as well as other infrastructure deficiencies unless it can directly benefit the monopolies.

It would be ridiculous for the government to give out \$100 to every Canadian family and tell them to take care of their own needs for electricity, water, sewage, highways and bridges in any way they choose. The infrastructure needs of Canadian society are beyond what any family could provide on its own. These services require the pooling of resources of the entire society. The same logic applies when it comes to health care, education and social services. However, the federal government puts the onus on individuals and families rather than the society when it comes to providing these services. For example, instead of investing in the creation of child care

spaces, the main thrust of the budget is to put the onus on parents. Through the new Universal Child Care Benefit the government will give parents a direct payment of \$100 per month for each under 6-year old child. The government says that this is an “action to refocus federal efforts on supporting families with children by providing Canadians with greater choice in child care through direct transfers to families with children.” It argues that: “Parents will be able to choose the child care option that best suits their family needs - whether that means formal child care, informal child care through neighbours or relatives, or a parent staying at home.” The government fails to point out that the child care benefit is taxable and that GST credits will also be reduced in accordance with the increase in family income, so many low income and single income families will actually end up losing more than the \$100 per child they receive under the new program. In fact, it appears that the program will only benefit middle and upper income families where one spouse does not work.

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punishment of a civilian population. The Israeli chapter of Physicians for Human Rights issued a statement condemning the use of collective punishment, noting it is “forbidden by International Law and by all reasonable moral standards.” The organization also charged that Israeli is deliberating trying to stop food shipments to Gaza in order to pressure the civilian population, pointing out this is also a violation of the Conventions.

However, despite calls from many in the international community and, most recently, official censure from the UN Human Rights Council, as well as UN Secretary General Kofi Anna, Israeli officials announced that they intend to escalate the invasion. In fact, starting on the morning of July 8, the IDF began expanding its operation in Gaza, with tanks advancing to within 500 metres of Gaza City. Israeli armour corps and infantry troops have been deployed east of Gaza City, in the area of the Karni Crossing, which is the only link Palestinians in Gaza have to those living in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. The IDF has also begun a campaign of “targetted shelling” against “know militants” which

resulted in the confirmed death of six civilians within the first 48 hours.

The escalation of the invasion followed Israel’s rejection of a ceasefire offer from Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh. In a statement issued from his office in Gaza, he called for Palestinian resistance fighters and the IDF to halt military operations unconditionally. “In order to get out of the current crisis, it is necessary that all parties restore calm on the basis of mutually stopping all military operations.” In response, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said his government would not negotiate with terrorists and added: “We won’t hesitate to carry out extreme action to bring [the captured soldier] back to his family.”

The UN Human Rights Council announced July 5 that it will send a special fact-finding mission to Israel and the occupied territories to investigate the invasion. The mission will be headed by John Dugard, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories. Addressing the special council session called to deal with the invasion, Dugard said it was clear that “Israel is in violation of

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any progress made by the DPRK and the Republic of Korea (ROK) to normalize relations between the two regimes and create conditions for the peaceful reunification of the country.

The Western media claims that the decision of the DPRK to develop long-range missile technology is a reflection of irrationality and paranoia and an example of North Korean brinkmanship. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the early 1990s, when the DPRK was undergoing an economic crisis brought on by the collapse of the Soviet bloc and massive flooding of its coal mines, the U.S. Clinton administration sought to bring down the North Korean government by threatening to launch a pre-emptive nuclear strike against the DPRK. The excuse for this threat was a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that several grams of fissionable material from the DPRK's heavy water nuclear reactors were missing. (The same year the IAEA reported that several kilograms of fissionable material were missing from Japan's nuclear energy program, but this did not provoke an American response.)

Former U.S. president Jimmy Carter intervened to save the Clinton administration from its brinkmanship and brokered an agreement in which the DPRK agreed to immediately shut down its Soviet-made heavy water reactors and allow extensive IAEA monitoring of all of its nuclear facilities in exchange for new U.S.-made light water nuclear reactors. Those reactors were never built. Furthermore, every attempt by the DPRK to reduce its economic difficulties by developing closer trade relations with the ROK was systematically sabotaged by the Clinton administration. When the Bush administration came to power in the U.S., even the pretense of implementing this agreement was dropped. George W. Bush labelled the DPRK as part of an "axis of evil" and adopted an open policy of pre-emptive nuclear strikes against North Korea. Following the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 the DPRK asked the U.S. to sign a pledge of non-aggression against the DPRK, but the Bush administration adamantly refused to do so. In these

circumstances the government of the DPRK apparently concluded that the only way to deter a U.S. invasion of North Korea was to develop its own nuclear weapons and long-range missile technology. It therefore withdrew from the Non-Proliferation Treaty, expelled the IAEA from the country and announced that it was actively developing nuclear weapons. It has now announced its intention to develop the ability to hit the U.S. with such weapons if the U.S. launches a nuclear first strike against the DPRK. From this it can be seen that it is the brinkmanship of successive U.S. administrations that has prevented the reduction of tensions on the Korean peninsula.

The government of the DPRK has repeatedly offered to end its nuclear weapons program and its development of long-range missiles in return for a guarantee of non-aggression by the United States and the fulfillment of the Clinton administration's promise to build light water nuclear reactors. If the U.S. were really interested in defusing the volatile situation on the Korean peninsula, it would agree to these reasonable demands. It would also put an end to its constant military exercises around the DPRK and facilitate, rather than block, talks between the DPRK and the ROK on the peaceful reunification of their country. The fact that it refuses to do these things shows that the U.S. still harbours hostile intentions towards the Korean people.

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