

Canada Gets Cozy with Repressive Middle East Monarchies

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While Justin Trudeau's government embraces repressive Middle East monarchies, they want us to believe their campaign to oust Venezuela's government is motivated by support for democracy and human rights.

On a tour of the Middle East last week **Defence Minister Harjit Singh Sajjan** met his United Arab Emirates counterpart **Mohammed bin Ahmed Al Bowardi** in Abu Dhabi. According to Emirates News Agency, Canadian and UAE officials discussed "[cooperation](#) in the military and defence sectors" at a time when the oil rich nation plays a key role in the [horrendous violence](#) in Yemen.

The Trudeau government is promoting arm sales to the UAE and other regional monarchies. With support from "[15 trade](#) commissioners and representatives from the Government of Ontario, National Defence, Global Affairs Canada, and the Canadian Commercial Corporation", 50 Canadian arms companies flogged their wares at the Abu Dhabi-based International Defence Exhibition and Conference (IDEX) in [February](#). To help the arms companies move their wares, Commander of the Bahrain-based Combined Task Force 150, Commodore Darren Garnier, [led a Canadian](#) military delegation to IDEX.

During his recent tour Sajjan met **King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein** in Jordan. He discussed military cooperation with a monarch known for prosecuting individuals for "[extending](#) one's tongue" (having a big mouth) against the King. At the end of March, Trudeau [phoned](#) King Abdullah II.

On April 9 the Canadian and Jordanian armed forces broke ground on a road project along the Jordanian-Syrian border. During a ceremony for the Canadian-funded initiative Commander of the Canadian Joint Operations Command, **Lieutenant General Michael Rouleau**, said:

"[this important](#) road rehabilitation project is a tangible example of the close relationship between Jordan and Canada. It will help keep the people of Jordan safe by allowing the Jordanian armed forces to deter, monitor and interdict incursions along the northern border with Syria, which will help to enhance security in Jordan and in the region."

On his Middle East tour Sajjan also met Kuwait's Prime Minister and Defence Minister Sheikh **Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah** who is part of a family that has ruled for 250 years. According to the Kuwait News Agency, Canada's defence minister "[stressed](#) deep relations between Kuwait and Canada and pointed out mutual willingness to bolster and consolidate

bilateral ties.”

Earlier in the month finance minister Bill Morneau and Parliamentary Secretary **Omar Alhabra** [participated](#) in the inaugural Kuwait and Canada Investment Forum. At the time Alhabra wrote,

“[let’s celebrate](#) and continue our efforts to grow the relationship between Canada and Kuwait in investments, trade and defence.”

Military ties with Kuwait are important because the Canadian forces have a small [base](#) there. In December the Canadian Navy [took command](#) of Combined Task Force 150 from their Saudi counterparts. Canada also has a small number of troops in the monarchies of [Bahrain](#), [the UAE](#) and [Qatar](#).

Last month Canada’s Ambassador to Qatar **Stefanie McCollum** boasted of growing relations between the countries, claiming “[our values](#) structures are very similar.” In an interview with *Al Bawaba* the Canadian diplomat also said Ottawa is seeking to deepen business ties with the natural gas rich monarchy and that the two countries are in the final stage of signing a defence cooperation agreement.

Notwithstanding the diplomatic spat last summer, the Trudeau government has mostly continued business as usual with the most powerful and repressive monarchy in the region. Recently foreign minister Chrystia Freeland looked the other way when Saudi student **Mohammed Zuraibi Alzoabi** fled Canada — presumably with help from the embassy — to avoid sexual assault charges in Cape Breton. While Freeland told reporters that Global Affairs was investigating the matter, *Halifax Chronicle Herald* journalist Aaron Beswick’s Access to Information request suggests they didn’t even bother [contacting](#) the Saudi embassy concerning the matter.

According to an access request by PhD researcher **Anthony Fenton**, Freeland phoned new Saudi foreign minister **Ibrahim Abdulaziz Al-Assaf** in January. In briefing notes for the (unannounced) discussion Freeland was encouraged to tell her counterpart (under the headline “points to register” regarding Yemen):

“[Appreciate the hard](#) work and heavy lifting by the Saudis and encourage ongoing efforts in this regard.”

Despite their devastating war in Yemen and dismembering of journalist **Jamal Khashoggi** at the consulate in Istanbul, Saudi Arabia continues to receive large shipments of Canadian weaponry. 2018 was a [record year](#) for Canadian rifle and armoured vehicle sales to the Saudis. [\\$17.64](#) million in rifles were exported to the kingdom last year and another [\\$1.896 million](#) worth of guns were delivered in February. In the first month of this year Canada exported [\\$367 million](#) worth of “tanks and other armoured fighting vehicles” to the Saudis.

As Fenton has documented in detail on his highly informative [Twitter](#) handle, armoured vehicles made by Canadian company Streit Group in the UAE have been [repeatedly videoed](#) in Yemen. Equipment from three [other Canadian](#) armoured vehicle makers – Terradyne, IAG Guardian and General Dynamics – was found with Saudi-backed forces in Yemen. The Saudi-led coalition used Canadian-made rifles as well.

On Tuesday the Saudis beheaded 37 mostly minority Shiites. Ottawa waited 48 hours — after many other countries criticized the mass execution — to release a “[muted](#)” statement. The Trudeau government has stayed mum on the Saudi’s recent effort to [derail](#) pro-democracy demonstrations in Sudan and [Algeria](#) as well as Riyadh’s [funding](#) for Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar’s bid to seize Tripoli by force.

The close and friendly relationships between the Trudeau government and repressive Middle East monarchies demonstrates how little the Liberals care about democracy abroad and illustrates the hypocrisy of Canada’s claims that its efforts to oust Venezuela’s government is all about supporting human rights and democracy.

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Featured image: Canada’s Defence Minister Harjit Singh Sajjan was on a tour of the Middle East last week. (Source: Yves Engler)

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