

# Trudeau promises Obama an enhanced Canada-US partnership

By Roger Jordan  
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Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and US President Barack Obama held their first bilateral meeting Thursday on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Manila.

Trudeau, who in campaigning for last month's election sharply criticized former Prime Minister Stephen Harper for "mismanaging" Canada's decades-long strategic partnership with Washington, stressed the importance of the US alliance for his Liberal government. "It's going to be a wonderful time of strengthening ties between our two countries," Trudeau told reporters at the conclusion of his 20-minute meeting with Obama. "On the economic, on the security, on the engagement with the world, and on a personal level."

Obama was no less enthusiastic, declaring, "There are no closer friends we have than the Canadians." Speaking of Trudeau, Obama said, "We are confident he is going to provide a great boost of energy."

Reaffirming an announcement made Tuesday, Trudeau said that the Canadian Armed Forces' training operation in Iraq will be expanded as part of Canada's contribution to the US-led Mideast war.

Trudeau emphasized that although his government will implement an election promise to withdraw the six CF-18 fighter jets currently bombing Islamic State (ISIS) positions in Iraq and Syria, it will take other steps to ensure that Canada is doing "more than its part" in supporting the US war coalition.

Trudeau's election rhetoric about opposing a "combat" mission in Iraq and Syria has been all but dropped. As news reports indicated again this week, the scope of the 69-man Canadian Special Forces' training mission now underway in northern Iraq is so broad that its personnel are regularly active on the front lines, helping call in coalition airstrikes and sometimes even

exchanging fire with militants.

At his Manila press conference, Trudeau began preparing public opinion for an expanded and extended training mission, saying, "This is a problem without a quick solution and we shouldn't be pretending it is." Obama agreed, describing the timetable for military operations in Iraq and Syria as "multi-year."

Obama and Trudeau's assertions that the coalition's main target is ISIS are a smokescreen. The US and its allies are seeking to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, a close ally of both Russia and Iran, as part of Washington's broader strategy of securing unbridled domination of the world's most important oil-exporting region.

Under the guise of fighting terrorism, the two leaders also discussed plans to increase intelligence sharing between the two countries, which are already cooperating closely through the US National Security Agency's "five eyes" partnership.

Obama left no doubt that he expects Canada to rapidly ratify the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade and investment deal. "We are both soon to be signatories to the TPP agreement," Obama told the leaders' joint press conference. "I know Justin has to agree with what's happened, but we think that after that process has taken place, Canada, the United States and the other countries that are here can establish the high standards agreement that protects labour, protects the environment, protects the kind of high value-added goods and services that we both excel in."

Obama's rhetoric is a sham. The 12-country pact is the economic arm of Washington's "Pivot to Asia," a comprehensive military-strategic, diplomatic and economic drive to encircle, isolate, and prepare for war against China. Just before the APEC summit, Obama announced \$250 million in additional maritime military

aid to the South China Sea states that Washington has been inciting to press their territorial claims against Beijing.

Canada is deeply implicated in the “Pivot.” In late 2013, the Harper government struck a secret agreement with Washington for enhanced Canada-US military cooperation in the Asian Pacific. Canada has also been strengthening its military-security cooperation with US allies in the region, including by seeking to establish new forward military bases in Singapore and South Korea.

Trudeau and Trade Minister Chrystia Freeland have repeatedly proclaimed their support for “free trade.” However, for political reasons they have yet to endorse the TPP agreement, which was negotiated in secret by the Harper government in the midst of the just-concluded election campaign.

There is little doubt that Trudeau will soon give Obama what he wants in regards to the TPP. Apart from sections of the auto industry, Canadian big business is strongly behind the agreement as it is eager to gain access to Japanese markets and expand its presence in Southeast Asia, a region rich in natural resources and cheap labour. Significantly, Trudeau has announced that he will not allow a “free vote” on the TPP, making its passage a foregone conclusion after it has been approved by cabinet.

According to Philippine media reports, Trudeau pledged in a meeting with the country’s President, Benigno Aquino, that he would assist the Philippines to join the TPP, a clear indication that Canada’s position on the deal is already decided.

Japanese media, meanwhile, have reported that Trudeau endorsed Tokyo’s position on the maritime border disputes in East Asia—a position that dovetails with Washington’s—when he and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe spoke by phone earlier this month.

Underscoring the eagerness on both sides for increased cooperation and coordination, Obama and Trudeau agreed that the Canadian prime minister will travel to the White House in January for more extensive discussions.

In keeping with Trudeau’s stated desire not to allow the dispute over the Keystone XL pipeline to mar Canada-US relations, Obama’s recent decision to reject the project was mentioned only in passing. Trudeau

said Canada must improve environmental regulation and, when repeating his call for increased energy cooperation with the US and Mexico, said this would require new and strengthened regulations.

Obama, who is hoping to use the Paris climate summit later this month to advance US business interests on climate change issues, expressed his delight at Canada’s support. “The fact that we now have a very strong partner in Canada to help set up some global rules around how we approach this I think will be extraordinarily helpful,” said the US President.

Trudeau’s strategy of pursuing closer energy and environmental cooperation within North America reflects growing concerns on the part of the Canadian bourgeoisie that its close military-strategic partnership with Washington, which has existed since the outbreak of World War II, is increasingly being undermined. Earlier this month, figures were published showing that in the first nine months of the year, China surpassed Canada as the US’s top trading partner. Mexico is also closing in on Canada for second place.

In a bid to prevent such developments lessening Canada’s influence in Washington and global reach, sections of Canada’s elite are urging even greater military-strategic collaboration between the two countries. During the election campaign, it emerged that the former head of Canada’s Defence Staff, General Tom Lawson, had met with his US counterpart, General Martin Dempsey, on several occasions to discuss the establishment of a joint military unit to be deployed in offensive operations around the globe. The two even floated the possibility of fully integrating the Canadian and US armed forces.

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