

Canada's ruling elite applauds Liberals' military spending hike

By Roger Jordan
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From the right-wing Conservatives to Canada's social democratic New Democrats (NDP), the ruling elite has united with enthusiasm around the Liberal government's new defence policy, which was introduced June 7 by Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan.

The defence policy included an additional \$62 billion for the military over the coming two decades. Spending will rise from the current level of \$18.9 billion to \$32.7 billion by 2026-27, enabling the purchase of a new fleet of fighter jets, the expansion of the armed forces by 5,000, the construction of new warships and the buying of armed drones.

A crucial part of the policy is a commitment to modernize NORAD, the defence cooperation agreement Canada has maintained with the US for decades which is aimed at targeting Russia and other potential adversaries to the global imperialist ambitions of Washington and Ottawa.

Conservative defence critic James Bezan fully endorsed the spending increase, but urged the Liberals to implement it even more rapidly. "Conservatives believe that our men and women in uniform deserve the best equipment, training and support available. That requires substantial investments to be made today—not in 20 years," he declared.

Right-wing commentator and newspaper owner Conrad Black, a fervent supporter of the Harper government who was one of the first to endorse Donald Trump's presidential election bid, expressed his delight with the plan, suggesting it could be the "most serious foreign policy in decades." Black described Sajjan's plan and the speech delivered a day earlier by Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland on Canada's foreign policy as "an interesting and commendable strategic effort."

In her foreign policy address, Freeland made clear that with tensions deepening among the globe's great powers, war would be a part of Canada's future. She outlined a dramatic escalation of the Liberals' aggressive assertion of Canada's military ambitions, stating that if Ottawa wanted to uphold its interests around the globe it would have to resort to "hard power."

Freeland explicitly praised US imperialism's role in the

post-war era as the global hegemonic power and vowed to maintain Canada's strategic partnership with its southern neighbour. She offered Canada as a bridge to overcome the deepening tensions between Washington and Europe, arguing that Ottawa had to work towards retaining the multilateral institutions set up in the wake of World War II.

The only criticism advanced by Black was that the Liberal government underestimates Canada's power. He claimed that Ottawa should be considered among the top 10 or 12 major global powers, ominously adding, "Canadians don't generally realize that we're not a middle power, but we must grow into the place we have earned."

John Ivison, a columnist for the neo-conservative *National Post*, described the Liberals' plan as one that would be expected from a conservative government, while the paper's editorial mocked the Liberals for having allegedly accepted a view of the world formerly espoused only by the Tories. "The real story here is that the government is finally abandoning Liberal delusions that Canada's role in the world was given power merely by symbolic internationalist rhetoric, unsupported by meaningful strength," the *Post* wrote.

The "meaningful strength" called for by the *Post* will be funded by the Liberals through the imposition of devastating attacks on the working class. In a comment on the policy, the McDonald Laurier Institute pointed out that it did not spell out where the funding would come from to purchase new equipment and increase the size of the army.

The Trudeau government clearly preferred to avoid laying out all of this in detail for fear of provoking popular outrage. However, the Liberals have long made clear that they plan to find \$6 billion in public spending cuts prior to the next election, a figure which will now increase to cover the military spending hikes.

The Liberals are attempting to sell their aggressive defence policy by concealing its content behind rhetoric about human rights and diversity. Drawing on identity politics, Sajjan vowed that 25 percent of the armed forces will be made up of women within a decade, and the defence

policy includes a section pledging the military to adopt recruitment practices to encourage First Nations people and other “visible minorities” to join the army. This, according to the Liberals, will help the army reflect the “diversity” of the country’s population.

A great deal was made about the Trudeau government’s commitment to using an approach known as “Gender-Based Analysis Plus,” in order to ensure that an equal number of men and women can participate in Canadian imperialist wars of aggression around the world.

Freeland wrote in the preface to the defence policy that the government was preparing a “progressive, feminist foreign policy,” which according to her speech will include development aid coupled with military deployments.

The effusive praise for the defence policy from the most right-wing sections of the Canadian bourgeoisie thoroughly exposes the bogus character of the Liberals’ “progressive” credentials, which have been boosted by the trade unions, the NDP and a host of campaign organizations prior to and since their election victory in 2015.

Since coming to power, the Trudeau government has expanded Canada’s involvement in the US-led Mideast war, and agreed to send 450 troops to Latvia as part of NATO’s military build-up in Eastern Europe against Russia. It was revealed this week that when the Liberals decided to extend the armed forces’ training mission in Ukraine for another three years in March, the government gave commanders on the ground the authority to send Canadian troops anywhere within the country, apart from the frontline of battle between Kiev and pro-Russian separatists and the Russian border areas.

In keeping with their long-standing support for Canadian military aggression stretching back to the NATO-led bombardment of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the NDP has not raised any criticism of the defence policy. None of its MPs saw fit to raise a single question during Question Period in the House of Commons in the days following the announcement.

Charlie Angus, a contender in the party’s ongoing leadership race, tweeted that it was necessary to develop a defence policy based on Canadian “values” and criticized Trudeau for being too closely aligned with Trump. But he had nothing to say about the 70 percent defence spending hike.

Nikki Ashton, who is being touted by various pseudo-left groups as the NDP’s Jeremy Corbyn, included a throwaway line during her introductory remarks at the latest leadership debate on Sunday, stating that it would be better to invest in social services than the military.

Ashton’s true attitude to questions of war and the militarization of Canadian foreign policy was illustrated

earlier this year, when she admitted to radical journalist Yves Engler that she could not remember how she had voted in parliament in 2011 on the bombardment of Libya, an intervention which the NDP fully endorsed with fraudulent claims about defending human rights.

The lack of even rhetorical opposition to the Liberals’ defence policy from within the NDP has prompted expressions of concern from its pseudo-left advisers, who fear that its failure to criticize the military build-up will damage its already tattered “left” credentials and prevent the NDP from smothering growing popular opposition to the political establishment.

Barry Weisleder of the Socialist Caucus, which advocates the absurd position that the right-wing, big business NDP can be pressured to stand up for the interests of working people, told the *Huffington Post*, “The fact that the NDP is silent on this and the fact that there is a leadership race is no excuse! ... They should have something to say about this Stephen-Harper-like policy—this exceeds Harper.”

Weisleder’s feigned outrage is a deliberate fraud. The NDP has had more than enough to say on Canadian wars of aggression over the past two decades for workers to conclude that it is a pro-war and pro-imperialist party, from its abandonment of any semblance of opposition to NATO, to its endorsement of Canada’s role in the brutal neocolonial occupation of Afghanistan and its support for Canada’s functioning as a key player in the US-led military build-up against Russia in the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

Throughout this entire period, Weisleder and his Socialist Caucus have remained loyal NDP members, providing a “left” cover for every shift to the right the party has made.

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