

Canada boosts support for US-led NATO missions in the Baltic and Iraq

By Roger Jordan
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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has reaffirmed Canada's staunch support for NATO and increased its commitments to US-led NATO military missions.

Canada is expanding its involvement in NATO's drive to threaten and encircle Russia and is assuming command of a NATO training mission in Iraq. These actions underscore the determination of Canada's ruling elite to aggressively pursue its own predatory interests and ambitions around the world, under conditions of deepening inter-imperialist rivalries.

In a visit to Latvia July 10, Trudeau announced that Canada's current contingent of 455 troops, which were sent to the Baltic last year to lead one of NATO's four "advance-deployed" battle groups in the region, will be increased to 540. Canadian leadership of the battle group was also extended through 2023. The other three NATO battle groups stationed on Russia's borders are located in Estonia, Lithuania and Poland, and are led by Britain, Germany and the United States respectively.

Following the announcement, the Liberal Prime Minister sharply denounced Russia for its alleged acts of "aggression," including the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

"We certainly hope that the message is passed clearly to President Putin that his actions in destabilizing and disregarding the international rules-based order that has been successfully underpinned by NATO amongst others over the past 75 years or so is extremely important," Trudeau declared.

Trudeau followed this up by delivering an anti-Russian tirade in the wake of US President Donald Trump's July 17 summit with Putin in the Finnish capital of Helsinki. Trudeau inveighed against Russia's "illegal annexation of Crimea" and "their incursion into the Donbas in Ukraine," and stated he was "glad" that 200 Canadian troops are training Ukrainian military and security forces in the west of the country. He then turned to criticizing

Moscow's support for the "murderous Assad regime," before concluding with a reference to the Skripal affair in Britain.

Although Trudeau studiously avoided criticizing Trump by name, his government has made no secret of its sympathy for the faction of the US ruling elite, led by the military-intelligence apparatus and the Democratic Party, which has attacked Trump for his conciliatory stance towards Moscow. This reached new heights following the Helsinki meeting, with media outlets including the *New York Times* denouncing Trump's actions as "treasonous."

Trudeau has proven no less strident in his anti-Russian stance than his Conservative predecessor, Stephen Harper. This has included appointing Chrystia Freeland, who is a notorious anti-Russian hawk, as Foreign Minister. Trudeau defended Freeland against all criticism when it emerged that her Ukrainian nationalist grandfather was a Nazi collaborator during World War II, denouncing this historically accurate description of his activities as a "smear" and an "attack on Canadian democracy."

Trudeau's boast that Canadian troops are training pro-government forces in Ukraine underscores his government's backing for the far-right nationalist regime in Kiev, which was brought to power in a US-orchestrated, fascist-spearheaded coup in February 2014.

The Canadian ruling elite's support for the hardline anti-Russia stance being championed by the "deep state" and the Democrats in the US is bound up with the bourgeoisie's preferred option of deepening its three-quarter century old military-strategic alliance with Washington, as the most effective means of advancing its global interests. At the same time, the Canadian bourgeoisie views Russia as a direct competitor in certain spheres, such as in the mounting conflict over control of the Arctic, which, due to climate change, is opening up as

a new transit route and lucrative source of oil and other raw materials.

The day after his Latvia trip, Trudeau attended the NATO summit in Brussels, where he committed 250 Canadian troops and helicopters to lead a new NATO training mission in war-ravaged Iraq. The mission, which will bolster Canadian forces in the war-ravaged country above a thousand, will involve training Iraqi government forces in counter-terrorism techniques, including disarming roadside bombs and improvised explosive devices. Trudeau also committed Canadian personnel and aircraft to maintaining NATO's Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS).

These moves were widely interpreted as an attempt to undercut Trump's criticism of Canada for its failure to meet the military alliance's commitment to spend 2 percent of economic output on defence by 2024. Last month, Trump addressed an official letter to Trudeau in which he took Ottawa to task for its military budget, which currently stands at around 1 percent of GDP.

Trump's criticisms are part of a deepening crisis in Canada-US relations. On the economic front, Trump's imposition of tariffs on steel and aluminum imports and his threats to rip up NAFTA and enforce tariffs on auto imports have thrown the Canadian ruling elite into turmoil. The Trudeau government, supported by the trade unions, has responded with the largest package to date of counter-tariffs against the US, totaling some \$16 billion. These tariffs came into force just weeks after Trump blew up the G-7 summit in Charlevoix, Quebec and denounced its host, Trudeau, as "very dishonest and weak."

Trump's economic nationalism, coupled with the breakdown of international multilateral institutions that is rooted in the global capitalist crisis, is undermining the strategy used by Canadian imperialism since the end of World War II to advance its interests on the world stage. This was to maintain an intimate strategic partnership with US imperialism, while at the same time relying on NATO, the trans-Atlantic alliance between the North American and European imperialist powers and other multilateral institutions and alliances to offset the vast power imbalance between the two countries.

Like their counterparts around the world, the Canadian elite is responding to the surge in global trade and geopolitical tensions with economic protectionism and rearmament. The Trudeau government is committed to hiking military spending by more than 70 percent over the next decade, taking overall defence spending to over 1.4 percent of GDP. This will include an expansion of the

army, the purchase of new fleets of fighter jets and warships, and the upgrading of the North American Aerospace Defense command (NORAD) in conjunction with the Pentagon.

Trudeau's attempts, continued at the Brussels summit, to pose as an opponent of the 2 percent NATO spending target, are driven solely by domestic political considerations, above all the understanding that an explicit commitment to such a dramatic spending increase would provoke popular opposition to militarism and war.

The new Iraq mission was accompanied by propaganda about Canada's supposed determination to uphold "democracy" and the "rule of law." Such claims are utterly fraudulent. Ever since Canadian troops were dispatched to Iraq by the Harper Conservative government in 2014, they have played a key role in waging a ruthless US-led war—a war that has arisen out of the series of ruinous wars that Washington has waged in the Middle East over the past three decades in an attempt to shore up its domination over the world's principal oil-exporting region.

After coming to power in 2015, the Trudeau government expanded the number of special forces deployed in the north of the country. As part of their support for Kurdish Peshmerga militias in northern Iraq, Canadian forces participated in the murderous offensive on Mosul, which claimed the lives of thousands of civilians and laid waste to what had been Iraq's second largest city.

Trudeau's new commitments have failed to satiate the ruling elite's appetite for a further militarization of Canadian foreign policy. Rosie Dimanno, writing in the liberal *Toronto Star*, declared, "Trump is right about Canada's military spending." For its part, the neoconservative *National Post* said Canada should be "embarrassed" by its defence budget. "Trudeau," it declared, "needs to smarten up on defence and pay our share to NATO."

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