Canada deeply implicated in US anti-China “pivot”

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14 November 2014

Behind the backs of the Canadian people, Stephen Harper’s Conservative government is integrating Canada ever more fully into Washington’s “pivot to Asia”—the US diplomatic, economic, and military thrust to strategically isolate and encircle China.

Launched by the Obama administration in the wake of the 2008-9 global financial crisis and economic slump, the US “pivot”—or in more recent Washington parlance, the “rebalance”—is aimed at containing and, if need be, militarily thwarting the rise of China, which became a nexus of global capitalist manufacturing at end of the last century and is now the world’s second largest economy.

By joining the US in its anti-China offensive, including its plans for war against nuclear-armed China, Canada’s ruling elite is seeking to advance its own imperialist interests in the Asia-Pacific region.

Documents issued by think-tanks tied to Canadian big business and Canada’s military-national security establishment— but largely ignored by the media—argue that if Canada wants its piece of the cake in the Asia Pacific, it must incorporate itself into the aggressive turn that the US is making in East Asia and the Indian Ocean region.

Not only has the US long been Canada’s closest economic and strategic partner. Since World War II it has been the dominant power in the Asia-Pacific region, and as such has facilitated Canadian imperialism in its drive to secure resources, markets, political influence and pools of cheap labour to exploit in the world’s most populous and fastest-growing economic region.

In November 2013, the Harper government signed “The Asia-Pacific Defense Policy Cooperation Framework,” a secret agreement with the United States to enhance Canadian-US military cooperation. While no details of the agreement have been made public, the Canadian government has hailed the Framework as **“** an example of how our two countries are working closely together to use our finite defence resources in a way that makes our joint efforts more complementary, more judicious, and avoids duplication.”

The Framework is one of over 200 military agreements, including NATO, NORAD (the North American Aerospace Defence Command) and the Permanent Joint Board on Defense that bind Canada’s military to the Pentagon. Indeed, no country’s military is more integrated with that of the US than Canada’s. For decades Canada’s military purchases, including those of the navy and air force, have been aimed at ensuring interoperability between Canadian and US forces.

Like their US counterparts, strategists for the Canadian bourgeoisie have concluded that under Obama’s predecessor, George W. Bush, Washington’s focus on waging aggressive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan caused it and Ottawa to pay insufficient attention to the Asia-Pacific region, allowing China to expand its influence largely unopposed.

Canada, argues a recent book endorsed by Canadian Council of Chief Executives head and former Liberal Finance Minister John Manley, must “broaden the bandwidth of our economic and security engagement to regions and corners of the globe, especially in the Asia Pacific, that are fast becoming the drivers of global economic growth and prosperity, and sources of insecurity. (Derek Burney and Fen Osler Hampson, *Brave New Canada* .)

An important element in the US pivot to Asia is the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the push to create a “free trade and investment” bloc including the three NAFTA partners—Canada, the US and Mexico—along with Australia, Brunei, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam.

Originally proposed by several smaller countries in 2005, the TPP was effectively taken over by the US as a means of forging a US-led Asian-Pacific economic bloc. The US is intent on excluding China from the TPP not only because it wants to gain privileged access to various countries’ resources, markets and labor forces so as to undermine China’s role as a production hub. It also wants to use the TPP to pressure China to opens its markets and as a means of establishing a US-designed world economic order, in which US-drafted rules on patents, investments and the role of state-owned companies, etc. will apply.

At the US’s insistence, Canada was included in the TPP negotiations in 2012. Canada’s elite views the negotiations as providing it a golden opportunity to expand the reach of Canadian big business. Canada is a world leader in mining and banking and financial services and has great ambitions to export oil and natural gas to Asia.

In addition to the TPP, Canada has negotiated a free trade agreement with South Korea, is a participant in the ASEAN Regional Forum, and is seeking to become a full member of the East Asia Summit.

Canada’s lining up behind the US “pivot” comes as a response to the mounting problems that Canadian capitalism faces in a context of global economic crisis and the collapse of the post-War capitalist order that was founded on the unchallenged economic domination of the US and its dollar.

Though trade with the United States still represents 70 percent of Canada’s overall trade, Canadian big business is losing market share in the US and China has surpassed Canada as the largest exporter to the US. The Canadian elite is anxious to shore up its position by increasing its trade with and investment in Asia.

At the same time, the Canadian bourgeoisie is responding to the relative economic and strategic decline of US imperialism by strengthening its military-strategic partnership with the US, for that

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partnership remains, in its view, far and away its best means to assert and defend its own predatory interests on the world stage.

With but one exception, Canada has played a major part in every major military action launched by Washington since the end of the Cold War—including the 1991 Gulf War, the 1993 incursion into Somalia, the 1999 NATO war on Yugoslavia, the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, the 2004 intervention in Haiti and the 2011 war for "regime change" in Libya.

Canada has also joined the US in pressing for NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe, including the incorporation of the Baltic states of the former USSR, and has played an especially provocatively role in the US-German spearheaded campaign to harness the Ukraine to western imperialism, even at the risk of provoking all-out war with Russia.

The Harper government has also deployed Canadian jet fighters to join the new US-led war in the Middle East. While currently directed at ISIS, this war's principal aim is the toppling of Syria's government, a close ally of Iran and Russia, so as to strengthen the US dominance over the world's most important oil-exporting region.

Canada, dating back to the original Confederation project of uniting the British colonies of North America, has always viewed itself as a "Pacific nation." Canadian troops served in India, Burma and Hong Kong during World War II and have participated in numerous Asian military missions since, most importantly the Korean and Afghan Wars. The decade-long Canadian intervention in Afghanistan (2001-2011) was part of a US thrust to establish a strategic beachhead in Central Asia, a region with massive gas and oil reserves, and in a country that borders China and Iran and is a short distance from Russia.

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is currently seeking to establish "advanced bases" in Singapore and South Korea that would become operational in the event of a conflict or a heightening of international tensions. Already the CAF participates regularly in US military exercises aimed at the Asia-Pacific region, including the biennial RIMPAC (Rim of the Pacific) naval exercise. Under its Military Training and Cooperation Program (MTCP), the CAF operates a number of training programs throughout the region, including in Mongolia (a poor, relatively remote country where Canadian mining corporations are active), Thailand and the Philippines.

Canada is also a major participant in the Ulchi Freedom Guardian Exercise, which tests the operational control of the US-led combined forces on the Korean peninsula. After the United States, Canada has in recent years been the largest contributor of foreign troops to exercises on the Korean Peninsula.

While Canada has significantly increased its military spending since 2000, the Obama administration, as well as sections of the Canadian ruling elite and the media, are voicing their concerns that Canada is not investing enough, and should do more, particularly in Asia. Hackles were raised in September when Harper said Canada would not comply with NATO's request that all member states spend the equivalent of at least 2 percent of GDP on their militaries.

However, it is not a lack of willingness on the part of the Conservative government that caused it to oppose NATO's policy, but rather the recognition that the decision to dramatically boost military spending in the context of social austerity could trigger broad popular opposition, even unrest.

Nonetheless, Canada has ambitious plans to expand its armed forces. Speaking at the 2013 Shangri-La Dialogue (the most important Asian military-security conference), then-Defense Minister Peter MacKay argued that Canada was "investing heavily in our navy—recapitalising in fact the entire fleet of combat vessels, supply vessels."

Although this has not been publicly confirmed, the Canadian military is reported to be considering following the US example and changing the balance between its Atlantic and Pacific fleets, so that 60 percent of its naval strength will be deployed in the Pacific. Were this shift to be implemented, it would serve to integrate Canada's navy still more closely with US war plans.

In an address last August in Singapore to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird spelled out the close connection between the Canadian elite's plans to expand its economic power in the Asian-Pacific region and its support for an aggressive military-security policy closely coordinated with that of the US. Moreover this policy, as Baird's remarks underscore, is aimed at securing US domination over not just East Asia, but the whole of Eurasia.

"You can't," said Baird, "have a free flow of crucial resources like LNG [liquefied natural gas] when a key maritime area like the South China Sea is bubbling with tensions. You can't have a sustainable reliance on certain Middle Eastern sources when a clerical regime in Iran threatens to start a nuclear arms race. You can't have open trade when it is necessary to take actions like sanctioning Russia over its provocations in Ukraine."

The Canadian-supported US "pivot to Asia" has already enormously exacerbated tensions in the region. Washington has encouraged Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines and other states to aggressively pursue their maritime territorial claims against China, while relentlessly pressing forward with its plans to economically and militarily cut China down to size and compel it to submit to US dominance.

Workers in Canada must join forces with their class brothers and sisters in the US, China and around the world in opposing the resurgence of North American imperialism and militarism. The only viable program for peace is the mobilization of the international working class to disarm the bourgeoisie through the establishment of workers' governments committed to the socialist reorganization of society.

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