

Canada hikes military spending

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Canada's Conservative government announced a major increase in military spending in last week's federal budget.

Starting in 2017, base military spending will be increased by three percent, rather than the current two percent. This will result in an additional \$11.8 billion in Canadian Armed Forces' expenditures over a decade. As the increases are compounded, the military budget in 2026 will be a whopping \$2.3 billion higher than hitherto budgeted.

Last week's budget also announced \$390 million in additional military spending in the current fiscal year, which began April 1. This is above and beyond the \$18.941 billion in expenditures outlined in the spending estimates the Conservative government presented to parliament in early March.

Of this \$390 million, fully \$360 million is to fund the extension and expansion of Canada's role in the new US-led war in the Middle East. At the end of March, Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced the Canadian Armed Forces' intervention in Iraq is being extended for a further 12 months, till April 2016, and that Canadian war planes will now bomb targets in Syria as well as Iraq.

According to Defence Minister Jason Kenney, by April 2016, Canada will have spent \$520 million on waging war in Iraq and Syria.

The budget also gave the Canadian Armed Forces \$7.1 million in additional money to fund the deployment of 200 military trainers to the Ukraine, where they will train forces loyal to the pro-western government that was installed in Kiev as a result of the US-engineered, fascist-spearheaded February 2014 coup.

The Conservatives' latest military spending increases have elicited little comment from the corporate media. But significantly, what comment there has been has taken the government to task for doing too little, too late—that is for not dramatically raising spending so as to quickly reach NATO's target of military expenditure equivalent to at least two percent of GDP.

The *Ottawa Citizen*, for example, published an article titled "Federal budget: Despite annual funding boost, defence faces uncertain times." It cited a series of military analysts complaining that the Conservative increases are

back-loaded to 2017 and are insufficient to counteract the cuts the government imposed as part of its drive to balance the budget, while continuing to lower taxes on big business and the rich. What the article conveniently omits is that these cuts were only levelled after the Conservatives, continuing on the trajectory of the Martin Liberal government, had hiked Canada's military spending to the point that, in 2011, it was in real—i.e. inflation adjusted terms—the highest it had been since the end of the Second World War.

There is little doubt the Harper government views the military spending increases announced in its recent budget as a mere down-payment. On its drawing boards are massive plans for rearmament, including the purchase of a new generation of jet-fighters, most likely the US F-35, and a whole fleet of war ships. But, with an election slated for this October, the government found itself boxed in by the combination of a rapidly deteriorating economic situation—which compelled it to resort to all sorts of accounting tricks and improvised one-time measures to fulfill its long-touted deficit elimination pledge—and popular opposition to the Canadian elite's aggressive militarist agenda.

Last September, when Harper was questioned by reporters about the discrepancy between his push for NATO to ratchet up pressure on Russia and his soft-peddling of its call for member states to pledge two percent of GDP on military expenditures, the prime minister frankly admitted that the Canadian people would not "understand" such a dramatic hike in military spending.

The opposition parties have said even less than the media about the government's plans to divert still more resources to the military, even as it ravages public and social services. This silence bespeaks their consent and support.

The entire political elite—from the Conservatives to the trade union-based NDP and the pro-Quebec independence Parti Quebecois and Bloc Quebecois—has supported the reorientation of Canada's foreign policy since the turn of the century. This reorientation has seen Canada play a leading role in a series of US-led wars and military interventions, including the 1999 NATO war on Yugoslavia, the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, the 2004 ouster of Haiti's

elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and the 2011 NATO war for “regime” change in Libya.

The role of the NDP, which as late as 2003 still claimed to oppose Canada’s participation in NATO, has been especially significant. Time and again it has given its imprimatur to the attempts of the Canadian elite and its US partners to cloak their predatory actions in claims of humanitarian intervention and the “responsibility to protect.”

The claim that Canada, a major belligerent in both world wars of the last century, was a “peacekeeper” nation was always a fraud. It was part of an effort to promote a “left” Canadian nationalism during the 1950s and 1970s, the better to politically tame the working class. Throughout the Cold War, Canada was a staunch US military ally, a founder-member of NATO and its partner in NORAD. For close to half-a-century, Canada’s military resources were overwhelmingly devoted to planning for World War III with the Soviet Union. Such UN peace-keeping operations Canada led or joined were, it should be added, always mounted with Washington’s approval and support.

That said, Canada’s ruling class is eagerly participating in a resurgence of imperialism. Led by the US, the major capitalist powers have revived war as an instrument of policy, are rearming, and routinely trammel on international law and state sovereignty.

In keeping with Canada’s new aggressive foreign policy, the ruling elite has put paid to the notion of Canada as a “peacekeeper.” The media celebrates Canada’s military prowess in past and current combat, while Harper routinely proclaims Canada a “warrior nation.”

Whilst the Canadian Armed Forces did not wage war for four decades, stretching from the end of the Korean War till its participation in the 1991 Gulf War, it has been almost perpetually at war in this century, in Afghanistan (2001-2011), Libya (2011), and since last fall in Iraq and now Syria.

Furthermore, Canada is deeply involved in all three of the major military-strategic offensives the US is mounting on the world stage.

#It has joined the war against the Islamic State—a war that arises out of the series of wars the US has waged in the Middle East and has the same objective as they did, to secure US hegemony in the world’s most important oil-exporting region.

#Canada has long assisted the US in its effort to transform Ukraine into a western satellite and its drive to expand NATO to Russia’s borders. With the full support of the opposition parties, the Harper government has deployed Canadian warplanes to Eastern Europe and battleships to the Black Sea so as to bolster NATO’s threats against Russia.

#In 2013, Canada signed a secret military agreement with the US integrating Canada into the “Pivot to Asia,” Washington’s drive to strategically encircle and isolate China. It is also participating in the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), through which Washington aims to establish a vast US-led economic bloc at China’s expense.

Canada’s Communication Security Establishment (CSE), it should be added, is one of the key partners of the US National Security Agency. The CSE is an integral part of both components of the NSA’s global operations: spying on the world’s governments and citizens, and assisting the Pentagon and CIA in waging war and eliminating “security threats.”

Like the US ruling class, Canada’s is rattled by the decline in the relative economic power of the US, its long-time strategic and economic partner, and the rise of new powers. It calculates it can best defend and assert its own predatory and increasingly significant economic and strategic global interests by supporting US imperialism in its drive to shore up its world position through the deployment of its military might, the one area where the US continues to enjoy massive superiority over all its rivals.

Imperialist aggression abroad goes hand in hand with the Canadian bourgeoisie’s ever-widening assault on the democratic and social rights of the working class at home—the criminalization of strikes, the expansion of the national-security apparatus and the systematic dismantling of public and social services.

Only through the systematic mobilization of the international working class on a socialist program against war, social inequality and in defence of worker and democratic rights can this imperialist resurgence and social counter-revolution be countered, and crisis-ridden capitalism prevented from sucking humanity down the vortex of escalating military conflict leading ultimately to global conflagration.



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