

Canada's parties united in urging military spending hike

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Defence policy emerged as a major issue in the Canadian election campaign this week, after Liberal leader Justin Trudeau announced that he would scrap plans for Canada to purchase a fleet of F-35 fighter jets should he become prime minister.

In 2010, the current Conservative government announced it intended to purchase 65 of the “fifth-generation” stealth jets from Lockheed Martin at a cost of \$9 billion. However, no contract was ever signed confirming the deal, and in the wake of subsequent criticism that the procurement process was mismanaged and the government had grossly underestimated the cost of the F-35s, the Conservatives put out a new tender for fighter aircraft. The F-35 is nonetheless the prohibitive favorite to win this competition.

Trudeau said a Liberal government would replace Canada's existing fleet of CF-18s with a cheaper fighter without stealth capabilities so as to make funds available to invest in additional ships for the Royal Canadian Navy. Making clear that the scrapping of the F-35 purchase was in no way meant to reduce Canada's military power, the Liberal leader criticized the Conservatives for failing to speedily follow through on a number of weapons purchases, adding that Canada's military needs “more teeth and less tail.”

Trudeau's plan to drop the F-35 purchase was quickly rejected by Prime Minister Stephen Harper. The Conservative leader sought to posture as a defender of Canadian jobs, warning that excluding Lockheed Martin from the fighter competition would hinder Canadian aerospace firms from obtaining further sub-contracting work on the F-35.

Significantly, NDP leader Thomas Mulcair also roundly attacked Trudeau. Demonstrating the NDP's commitment to spending billions on giving the Canadian Armed Forces greater fire-power and dismissing the Liberals for failing to follow the established military-dominated procurement selection process, Mulcair said of Trudeau, “When he says things like that, he's just showing his total lack of experience. That's not the way these things work.”

Mulcair and his NDP oppose ruling out Canada's purchase of the F-35, saying it should be among a handful of fighter jets included in a revised bidding process.

Purchase of the F-35 is strongly supported by much of

Canada's military-security establishment and ruling elite. They view it as important to deepening the alliance with US imperialism that for decades has served as the cornerstone of the Canadian bourgeoisie's military-security and foreign policies.

Adopting the fighter jet would improve interoperability between the US and Canadian armed forces, which are already collaborating closely in key strategic deployments around the world. The Conservative government has sent troops and aircraft to the US-led war in Syria and Iraq, made available air, land and sea resources for NATO operations in the Baltic and Eastern Europe targeting Russia, and has integrated Canada into the US “Pivot to Asia,” which aimed at isolating and weakening China economically, geopolitically and militarily.

Regardless of the disagreements over the F-35, all four main parties—the Conservatives, NDP, Liberals, and Greens—are fully behind strengthening the capacities of Canada's armed forces so it can continue to serve as a major partner of the Pentagon. In defence policy statements prepared for the military magazine and internet web site *Esprit de Corps*, all three opposition parties lambasted the Conservative government for dragging its feet on a number of procurement projects and reducing military spending after 2011 as part of its austerity drive.

Jack Harris, the NDP's defence critic, claimed that \$2.7 billion had been cut from Defence since 2011, while Joyce Murray for the Liberals and Green leader Elizabeth May complained that Canada's military spending has now fallen below 1 percent of GDP.

None of the parties bothered to note that in 2011 Canada's military spending had reached its highest level in real dollar terms since World War II or that the Conservatives announced a new hike to the military budget earlier this year. (See: Canada hikes military spending)

The NDP, explained Harris in his *Esprit de Corps* piece, is committed to a review of defence policy, so as to “ensure that our military can defend Canada, protect Canadians, and contribute to international peace and security with an agile, well-equipped, world-class force.”

The NDP's intention to modernize the military and make it an “agile, well-equipped, world-class force” should come as no surprise. Canada's social democrats long ago abandoned even

verbal opposition to militarism and war and have instead embraced Canadian imperialist interventions wholesale. Since the 1999 NATO war on Yugoslavia, the NDP has supported Canada's leading role in one US-led war or intervention after another, including the Afghanistan war, the ousting of Haiti's elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004, and the 2011 "regime change" war in Libya.

The NDP's stated opposition to the war in Syria and Iraq is purely a tactical disagreement, and it is fully behind the Conservatives' aggressive moves in alliance with US imperialism against Russia in Eastern Europe. Earlier this month, as 200 Canadian Armed Forces' personnel were arriving in Ukraine, Muclair reiterated the NDP's strong support for their mission to train the Ukrainian Army and National Guard.

To justify Canadian military interventions around the globe, Harper has seized every opportunity during his tenure as prime minister to promote adulation of the armed forces and a bellicose Canadian nationalism. In marking the 100th anniversary of the beginning of World War I, he proclaimed Canada a "warrior nation" and touted the reactionary lie that Canadians' owe their democratic rights to the armed forces. The Conservatives' promotion of militarism has been accompanied with a massive assault on democratic rights at home, of which Bill C-51 is only the most recent and egregious example. (See: Canada's Bill C-51: A sweeping assault on democratic rights and legal principles—Part 1)

None of the other parties have raised any objection to Harper's promotion of militarism. In fact the NDP has joined in, with a proposal to make Remembrance Day a national holiday—not to reflect on the tremendous loss of life produced by imperialist wars, but to enable the population to be mobilized behind flag-waving nationalism and celebrations of the military.

In his *Esprit de Corps* statement, current Defence Minister Jason Kenney touts the government's creation of new military facilities in the Arctic region, where Ottawa has territorial disputes with Russia, the US, Denmark, and Norway. According to Kenney, a re-elected Tory government would expand military spending by 3 percent annually from 2017, resulting in a growth of the defence budget by \$11 billion over ten years.

Liberal defence spokeswoman Joyce Murray raised the prospect of a sharp increase in military deployments both domestically and overseas, writing, "Abroad, severe and destabilizing weather events like floods, heat waves, droughts, or typhoons will require Canada's military and humanitarian assistance beyond the capacity of our standard DART deployment. At home, Canadian troops have already mobilized in response to an extreme fire disaster in Saskatchewan."

In other words, a Liberal government would look to seize every opportunity to deploy military force in defence of Canadian imperialist interests under the guise of humanitarian

aid. This approach is in the tradition of previous Liberal governments, which took Canada to war in Yugoslavia in 1999 and Afghanistan in 2001. In 2001, the Liberal government also took the lead in establishing the international commission on military intervention that developed the "Responsibility to Protect" or R2P doctrine. R2P has repeatedly been used as the pretext for imperialist war.

The Greens' Elizabeth May, who authored her party's *Esprit de Corps* response, adopted a similar stance to the Liberals. Defence spending is "guided by little long-term national interest, principle or purpose," she argued. She also noted the military's deployment to Saskatchewan this summer, suggesting that further domestic operations should be anticipated. The Greens are calling for the elaboration of a comprehensive security plan to better coordinate activities between the RCMP, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the border agency, and other security and intelligence agencies.

May stressed the importance of the Arctic, complaining that Russia has 16 deep sea ports along its Arctic coast whereas Canada has none.

She continued, "Canada is well-suited to contribute to practical, innovative means of civil-military co-operation and to provide essential support to deliver humanitarian and development assistance in complex conflict zones. We should also support the United Nations' 'responsibility to protect' (R2P) doctrine."

May was compelled to admit that NATO's 2011 Libya war was justified on the basis of R2P—with the unsubstantiated claim that Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was preparing a massacre of civilians in Benghazi serving as the pretext for establishing a NATO no-fly zone that quickly morphed into a bombing campaign aimed at "regime change." Unable to deny that as a result Libya now lies in ruins and that she herself voted in favor of Canada's participation in the war on Libya, May sought to draw an arbitrary line between the initial stages of the mission, allegedly motivated by R2P, and subsequent developments, when, according to May, Canada and its allies decided to "shift to the goal of regime change."

Such sophistry cannot disguise the fact that, irrespective of the propaganda employed by the US and its allies, the Libyan mission was an imperialist war from the outset. In seeking to deny this reality, May is reprising the role played by Green parties internationally in providing humanitarian justifications for aggressive military interventions aimed at consolidating the economic and geopolitical interests of the imperialist powers, Canada included.



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