

Canadian election: Militarism and reaction dominate foreign policy debate

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The leaders of Canada's three major national parties used Monday evening's foreign policy debate to stake their respective claims to being the most capable and determined defender of Canadian imperialism's interests on the global stage.

Hosted by Munk Debates, a foundation established by the principal shareholder in the world's largest gold producer (Barrick Gold), the debate was dominated by discussion of how best to employ Canada's military in advancing the predatory interests of Canadian big business and how to manage Canada's strategic partnership with Washington.

Conservative leader Stephen Harper, New Democratic Party (NDP) head Thomas Mulcair, and the Liberals' Justin Trudeau vied with one another as to who could denounce "Russian aggression" in eastern Europe and the Arctic in the most strident terms.

All agreed that Canada must act in concert with the US on the world stage. But while Harper contended that under his government Canada is "acting with the Americans around the world" and "enjoys a great relationship with the US," Trudeau and Mulcair accused him of mismanaging the relationship with Washington to the detriment of Canada's economic and geopolitical interests.

Harper made a series of extreme right-wing appeals, beginning with his claim that Canada's bombing of Iraq and Syria is necessary to prevent ISIS from attacking Canada. In fact, ISIS is the outcome of the series of illegal wars that US imperialism has waged and fomented in the Middle East in the interests of dominating the world's most important oil-exporting region.

Harper touted his government as the world's staunchest defender of Israel and boasted that "no government in the world" has been more supportive of the pro-Western regime established in the Ukraine as the result of the February 2014 US-orchestrated, fascist-spearheaded coup.

He attacked the opposition parties for criticizing his government's callous indifference to the plight of refugees from the US-instigated wars in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in the broader Middle East. He accused them of "headline chasing" and again insisted that the refugees constitute a massive security threat.

Harper was also quick to point to his government's mid-election campaign decision to use a controversial and likely unconstitutional law to strip five individuals who have been convicted of terrorism offenses of their Canadian citizenship, in the process working in a reference to the 9/11 attacks. Bill C-24 has been widely denounced for creating two types of citizens (only naturalized citizens can be stripped of their citizenship) and for transforming citizenship from an inalienable right into something that the state can withdraw.

In last week's French-language debate, Harper, seconded by Bloc Quebecois leader Gilles Duceppe, similarly sought to employ a

reactionary "wedge issue" to attack his NDP and Liberal opponents. In that case, he denounced them for opposing an undemocratic—and again in all likelihood unconstitutional—ban on Muslim women who are wearing a niqab from being administered the oath of citizenship.

Encouraged by a deliberately provocative question from the debate moderator about the Canadian navy's lack of icebreaker ships capable of operating in Arctic waters, Harper listed a long list of military initiatives his government has taken in the far north. These include opening a military training base at Resolute Bay, the holding of regular military exercises in the Arctic, and the expansion of the Canadian (Arctic) Rangers.

Turning to Ukraine, Harper proclaimed that a Conservative government would never acquiesce to Putin retaining "one square inch" of "Ukrainian territory." This full-throated defense of his government's aggressive moves in eastern Europe, such as the recent deployment of 200 military personnel to Ukraine to train the Kiev regime's army and national guard, provoked not a word of criticism from Mulcair and Trudeau.

Indeed, in so far as they criticized Harper in respect to the Ukraine, it was for failing to live up to his bellicose denunciations of Russia and Putin.

Though Canada's military-security establishment and much of the media are calling for a sharp increase in military spending, the issue received little attention in the debate. Perhaps this is because all three parties have already signaled that they intend to implement the 10-year, C \$11 billion, escalating hike in the Defense budget that the Conservatives announced in their last budget (see: "Canada's parties united in urging military spending hike").

NDP commits to US-led anti-ISIS coalition

NDP leader Mulcair has spent the election campaign promoting himself as a right-wing establishment politician and otherwise distancing Canada's social democrats from any association, however remote, with the working class or significant social reform.

Opinion polls now suggest that the Liberals, the Canadian elite's preferred party of government in the last century, have been able to gain traction with hypocritical attacks on the NDP for its steadfast support for balanced budgets and opposition to raising the taxes of even the richest Canadians.

Nonetheless, Mulcair remained true to form. It was left to Trudeau to remind listeners that Harper, as leader of the Official Opposition,

had roundly denounced the 11th-hour decision of the Chretien Liberal government to keep Canada out of the illegal 2003 US invasion of Iraq.

While Mulcair reiterated the NDP's commitment to end the Canadian Armed Forces' Mideast combat and training mission, he vowed that Canada under an NDP government would remain part of the US-led anti-ISIS coalition, which serves as a cover for Washington's drive to dominate the Middle East, including its push for regime change in Damascus.

Mulcair emphasized that the NDP stands ready to deploy Canadian troops including in battle, citing as examples the NDP's support for NATO's 2011 regime-change war in Libya and its "spontaneous" endorsement of the military assistance Canada has provided France in Mali. "We understand," said Mulcair, "that there will be times when we have to...use force. We won't shy away from that."

Mulcair criticized Harper for not doing enough to counter Islamic "radicalization" at home, then immediately touted the NDP's plan to fund the hiring of 2,500 additional police.

The NDP leader argued that Harper had damaged the Canada-US strategic alliance due to his insistence that Washington approve the Keystone XL oil-bitumen pipeline, to which Harper retorted, what would "really poison the relationship" would be to end Canada's leading role in the US's Mideast war.

Both Mulcair and Trudeau urged a renewal of Canada's commitment to the United Nations' or, in Canadian parlance, Pearsonian "peacekeeping" missions. Even in their heyday during the Cold War, such missions were always a mechanism for the defense of imperialist interests in Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere. This has only been confirmed by the subsequent evolution of peacekeeping into a justification for aggressive military interventions under the banner of the "responsibility to protect" or R2P doctrine. The Chretien Liberal government played a major role in the formulation and international promotion of R2P.

When the Liberals last held power, they signed Canada up for a series of aggressive wars, including the 1999 NATO war on Yugoslavia and the Afghan war, while proclaiming their adherence to peacekeeping traditions and "humanitarian intervention." They also mobilized the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in support of a US regime-change operation in Haiti that saw the country's elected president driven from power with the assistance of fascist-minded ex-Haitian military leaders and Tonton Macoutes.

Trudeau defends Harper's "police-state" Bill C-51

During Monday's debate, Trudeau mounted a frontal attack on Mulcair for the NDP's opposition to Bill C-51, the draconian anti-terrorism law passed by the Harper government last spring with Liberal support. While claiming Bill C-51 needs amendment, Trudeau denounced Mulcair for "playing the politics of fear" because of the NDP's limited warnings about the massive new powers the legislation gives Canada's national security apparatus. These include virtually unfettered right to all government information on individuals involved in national security investigations and increased powers of preventive arrest. Bill C-51 also empowers the Canadian Security Intelligence Service to break virtually any law in "disrupting" reputed threats to Canada's national and economic security.

As part of his attack on the NDP, Trudeau trumpeted the battery of "anti-terrorism" measures the Liberals took in the wake of 9/11. In truth, the Liberals presided over many of the key pillars of the national security apparatus, which the Conservatives expanded, including the mass surveillance of Canadians' electronic communications, the establishment of a catch-all definition of terrorism, and the complicity of the intelligence agencies in rendition programs and torture.

Trying to strike a pose of "balance" between the NDP and Conservatives, Trudeau stressed that while a Liberal government would end the CAF bombing mission in Iraq and Syria, it would keep ground troops in Iraq to train local forces. "The Liberal Party," declared Trudeau, "know that Canada has an important role to play on the world stage and should be a strong partner in this coalition." Arguing that the use of Western troops "often makes things worse," Trudeau insisted that the best use of Canada's military would be in training local fighters. Significantly, as an example of how such policies have been successful in the past, he cited Afghanistan, where Canada played a major role in the US's neo-colonial war for more than a decade.

The fraudulent character of Trudeau's pose as a proponent of international law and humanitarianism was demonstrated by his outspoken praise for the Obama administration. Under Obama, the US has baldly asserted the right to militarily intervene wherever its "national interests" are threatened, routinely violates state sovereignty with its drone assassination program, and uses the NSA to spy on people and governments the world over. Moreover, with Obama as commander-in-chief, the US is mounting an aggressive drive to confront its rivals in every corner of the world, from its war in the Middle East and the deployment of military forces to eastern Europe and the Baltic region to its Pivot to Asia, which is aimed at isolating and encircling China.

Trudeau spent the final part of the debate giving his full backing to Washington's anti-China policy by urging Canada to reach a deal on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), an economic bloc specifically aimed against Beijing. He dismissed any concerns that the deal could negatively affect jobs in the auto industry and dairy farmers by opening Canada to low-cost competition, insisting that free-trade deals concluded in the past have protected Canadian interests. Trudeau's reference here was to the interests of the ruling elite, which sees the opportunity to access the growing markets of the Asia-Pacific as crucial to securing the profitability of Canadian big business.



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