

Why are Canada's politicians mute about the Canada-US military integration plans?

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6 October 2015

The revelation that the most senior commanders of the Canadian and United States militaries held a series of meetings in 2013 to consider the possibility of fully integrating their countries' armed forces has been met with a deafening silence from Canada's political leaders and the corporate media.

Canada's state-owned broadcaster, the CBC, prominently featured two articles on the integration talks last week. The CBC cited an October 2013 briefing note prepared by the Canadian Armed Forces' "Strategic Joint Staff," which it had obtained through a freedom of information request, and anonymous Canadian military sources.

Apart from these two reports, not a single politician or major daily newspaper has so much as referred to the integration talks, let alone discussed their implications or demanded further information from the military or government about them.

That Canada is in the midst of a federal election campaign makes this silence all the more extraordinary. Elections purportedly give Canadians the opportunity to debate and make an informed choice about the make-up and direction of their government. Yet none of the parties has seen fit to comment on or even raise a single question about a hitherto secret "Canada-US Integrated Forces" program that, to cite the CBC, "was led at the highest levels" of the countries' respective militaries.

The then head of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, and Canada's Chief of the Defence Staff, Tom Lawson, met on "several occasions" to personally direct the integration program and "hash out a plan."

Three proposals for deepening the already extensive collaboration between Canada's military and the Pentagon were actively considered: further enhancing interoperability; establishing a permanent joint foreign intervention force made up of air, sea, land and Special Forces drawn from both militaries; and the full integration of the Canadian and US militaries. The establishment of a "standing integrated force" was framed in explicitly offensive terms, with its primary goal being the capacity to deploy to "hot spots"

around the globe.

None of these proposals was ever explicitly ruled out, with the plan for full integration merely being rejected "at this time," in the words of Lawson.

In the only public statement released on the talks, a spokesman for the Conservative government of Stephen Harper asserted that the government knew nothing whatsoever about them.

There is good reason to believe that this denial is a cover-up, motivated by electoral considerations. After all, the Conservative government has championed the military and Canada's leading role in the US's major military-strategic offensives.

However, if it is indeed the case that Canada's military top brass discussed plans to integrate the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) with the US military without government approval, it would signify that civilian control over the military has virtually broken down.

The alternative—that the government is lying to the public and was conducting secret talks about unifying the Canadian and US militaries—is no less chilling. The more ambitious of the proposals discussed by Dempsey and Lawson would essentially make it impossible for the US to engage in military conflict without Canada becoming immediately involved.

During close to a decade in power, Harper and the Conservatives have shown no qualms about employing anti-democratic methods to enforce their reactionary agenda. In December 2008, Harper prevailed on the unelected governor general to shut down parliament so as to prevent opposition MPs from exercising their right to oust his minority government. This constitutional coup had overwhelming support within the ruling elite, which backed Harper as the "strong leader" Canada required to slash public services and workers' social rights and pursue Canadian imperialism's predatory interests on the global stage.

The Conservatives are currently waging an extreme rightwing election campaign, combining anti-Muslim chauvinism, fear-mongering over the threat of terrorism, and

the promotion of military interventions in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. To divert attention away from growing social inequality and deepening economic crisis, Harper has whipped up a reactionary hysteria over a handful of Muslim women wanting to wear the niqab during citizenship ceremonies.

The Canada-US military integration talks are being deliberately ignored by all of the parties because they have no desire to warn the population about the implications of the Canadian military's further integration with the Pentagon, which has been engaged in war in one part of the world or another continuously for the past quarter century.

As it is, the CAF and the US military are already the most closely integrated armed forces in the world, with extensive cooperation on North American air defence having existed for decades within the framework of NORAD. But as was made clear by the content of the latest discussions, this relationship has been increasingly transformed into collaboration in offensive military operations, both through the NATO alliance and bilateral Canada-US agreements.

The growing danger of war between the major powers would have been a central consideration for the top brass from both armed forces in their 2013 talks. The Strategic Joint Staff briefing note was written in October 2013, just prior to the conclusion of a secret agreement between the Canadian and US armed forces for enhanced cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region in line with the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia." This strategic reorientation is explicitly aimed at isolating China economically, strategically, and militarily. As part of its own "pivot to Asia," the Canadian military is seeking new forward bases in Singapore and South Korea.

The CAF is also playing a crucial role in Washington's aggressive moves against Russia. Canadian troops were recently deployed to Ukraine to work alongside US soldiers to train Ukrainian forces for their war against pro-Russian separatists in the east. Within NATO, Canada is increasing its participation in the alliance's provocative operations in the Baltic and Black Seas, and Eastern Europe, which carry the danger of triggering a conflict with Moscow, the world's second-largest nuclear power.

In Syria, where divisions between US imperialism and Russia have flared up in recent weeks, Canada is one of the few western powers flying bombing raids alongside the US air force, meaning that it could quickly be pulled in to an emerging conflict with Moscow. And in the Arctic, US military planners are keen to integrate Canada into a missile defence system explicitly aimed at intimidating the Putin regime and asserting US and Canadian territorial claims.

The opposition NDP and Liberals are in full agreement with Canada's long-standing strategic partnership with the

United States and have no objection in principle to the further integration of the Canadian and US militaries.

Their commitment to the most basic bourgeois democratic principles is so minimal that it is of no concern to them that the military may have been acting without the knowledge of the government, or that the government has been lying to the Canadian population about plans to further integrate Canada's military with that of the world's most aggressive imperialist power.

During last week's foreign policy debate, which took place the same day as the CBC revealed the plan for a permanent Canada-US foreign intervention force, both NDP leader Tom Mulcair and the Liberals' Justin Trudeau pledged to strengthen Ottawa's relations with the United States. Trudeau, whose bid to return the Liberals to power is winning increasing support from the corporate-controlled media, hailed the US as Canada's greatest ally in the fight for freedom and democracy.

At the same time, the party leaders raced to outdo each other in their denunciations of Russia. Trudeau responded to Harper's declaration that Canada would not permit Russia to hold "one square inch" of "Ukrainian territory" by denouncing Putin as an aggressor. Mulcair affirmed that an NDP government would continue to support the pro-western, far-right Ukrainian regime, before assailing Harper from the right for allegedly failing to implement sufficiently stringent sanctions against the Kremlin.

All three parties are fully committed to an increase in military spending and the rearmament of the CAF. The Conservatives are in favour of an additional \$11 billion in defence spending over ten years beginning in 2017, the expansion of the CAF's Special Forces by a third, and the purchase of a new fleet of jet fighters and warships. The Liberals have vowed to spend more on the navy by abandoning the planned purchase of the F-35 stealth fighter in favour of a cheaper model. The NDP has strongly criticized the Conservative government for failing to provide the CAF with greater firepower and other resources, with defence spokesman Jack Harris calling for an "agile" military capable of intervening around the globe.



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