Canadian Liberal government to implement military spending hikes

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28 March 2016

In presenting its first budget last week, Canada's Liberal government reaffirmed its election pledge to retain its Conservative predecessor's plan to hike base military spending by 1 percent per year for nine years beginning in 2017. When inflation adjustments are included, this will amount to 3 percent annual military-spending increases through 2026.

The Liberals' commitment to a further $10 billion in military expenditure reflects the overwhelming support within the ruling elite for improving Canada's capacity to participate in US imperialism's wars and strategic offensives.

In power since only last November, the Liberal government has already expanded and extended Canada's role in the Mideast war and is now considering, whether under the NATO or United Nations' banner, undertaking new military interventions in Africa and Haiti.

Finance Minister Bill Morneau made clear that the government also stands firmly behind the previous government's plans to spend tens of billions on new military equipment.

The budget postponed $3.7 billion in major military procurement spending until after 2020, but only because of what Canadian military analysts have termed a "broken procurement system." In comments to the media, Morneau emphasized that the Liberals are about to launch a Defence policy review, which is slated to be completed by the end of the year. The review, he vowed, would produce "a new defence strategy that will deliver a modern, more agile and better-equipped military."

In the run-up to the defence review, the corporate media and various big business think tanks have published a torrent of articles bemoaning the Canadian military's "out-of-date" equipment and demanding new weapons systems be urgently procured. A recent report by the Canadian Defence Associations (CDA) criticized Canada for its failure to meet the NATO target of spending 2 percent of GDP on defence. Meeting this target would require a doubling of Canada's current base defence spending to some $40 billion per year

The major items the ruling elite is demanding include a new fleet of fighter aircraft to replace the current CF-18 model, navy destroyers, search-and-rescue aircraft, and maritime patrol aircraft. The inability of the previous Conservative government to move forward with these procurements was a significant factor in the swinging of key sections of the ruling elite behind Trudeau and his Liberals in last fall's election campaign.

Speaking at a military-security conference last month, Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan emphasized the defence policy review would look at ways to expand the military's activities. He ruled out cutting military personnel, meaning the increases that the Conservatives implemented in uniformed personnel will remain. "We need to consider what role we want Canada, and our military, to play on the world stage," said Sajjan. "Our government is committed to a policy of re-engagement with the world. We need a defence vision that is firmly grounded in our broader foreign policy objectives, and that reflects the aspirations of Canada."

Chief of the Defence Staff General Jonathan Vance declared earlier this month that he would be pushing for the government to take a decision during the review on the purchasing of armed drones. Vance had previously provocatively commented that there would be little point in acquiring drone surveillance capability if the drones couldn't also strike targets.

The defence policy review is also expected to give prominence to expanding the military's activities in the Arctic. Canada has long pursued large sovereignty claims in the Arctic Ocean, and the ruling elite is determined to work with the US through NORAD to counter Russia's presence in the region as part of a broader strategy to subordinate Moscow to their common geopolitical interests. Last month, Canada expanded its Arctic military base at Resolute Bay so it can host troops all year round.

In his visit to the White House earlier this month, Trudeau praised the two countries' close military-strategic collaboration and signed an agreement to deepen Canada-US

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cooperation in the Arctic.

Trudeau has made strengthening Canada's strategic partnership with US imperialism a key priority since coming to power. Canada's ruling elite views its seven-decades' old alliance with the US as critical to asserting its own imperialist interests on the global stage and for that reason shares Washington's apprehensions about the relative decline in US economic dominance and global strategic hegemony, increasing rifts among the imperialist powers, and challenges from China and other emerging powers.

Canada is already deeply implicated in US imperialism's three major geostrategic offensives.

In early February, Trudeau announced a tripling of the deployment of Canadian Special Forces to Iraq and the seconding of additional military personnel to the US-led war coalition's command structures. The war in Syria and Iraq, waged under the pretext of combatting the Islamic State (ISIS), is aimed at toppling the Assad regime and consolidating Washington's dominance over the world's most important oil-producing region.

In Eastern Europe and the Baltic, Canada has been one of Washington's closest partners in NATO's aggressive moves to encircle Russia following the 2014 US-sponsored coup in Ukraine. Less than two weeks after announcing with great fanfare the withdrawal of Canada's six CF-18s from operations in Iraq, Ottawa sent four of them to Romania, a NATO ally which borders Ukraine, for training exercises. A Canadian warship is also part of the NATO mission in the Aegean Sea between Greece and Turkey, aimed at preventing refugees from reaching Europe.

In Asia, Canada is fully integrated into Washington's "Pivot," which is aimed at economically isolating and militarily-strategically encircling China in preparation for war.

The Liberals are attempting to repackage this aggressive, militarist foreign policy in a more "progressive" garb than Stephen Harper's Conservatives. In February, Trudeau welcomed UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon to Ottawa and publicly pledged his government's readiness to commit more to "peacekeeping" missions. Earlier this month, the Prime Minister was at the UN in New York to announce his government's intention to pursue one of the rotating seats on the UN Security Council that come free in 2021.

Discussions on a series of military deployments are already well advanced. The French-language Montreal daily *Le Devoir* reported March 17 that the government is consulting with experts about which military missions it could participate in to "reengage" with UN peacekeeping.

The most likely candidate appears to be Mali, where French troops have been deployed since 2013 to support the government in combatting Islamist forces in the country's north . *Le Devoir* noted diplomatic, historical, security and strategic reasons for Canada intervening in Mali. Canada has major economic interests in the West African country, with significant investments in the mining sector. The previous government targeted Mali as having significant growth potential for Canadian business, making it a priority country for Canadian foreign policy and foreign aid.

Up to 2,000 Canadian troops and police could also take over the UN mission in Haiti, which is currently headed by Brazilian forces that are scheduled to pull out later this year. UN forces have occupied Haiti since Canada's military invaded the country in 2004 in conjunction with US and French troops so as to oust its elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

In a recent *National Post* comment, veteran foreign affairs correspondent Matthew Fisher listed a series of other countries where Canada might soon intervene militarily as part of a UN peacekeeping mission. They included Burkina Faso and Niger, where French troops are already stationed, and even Burundi. Fisher emphasized that it was all but certain at least one mission in Africa will go ahead and that such active participation in policing the current world order is considered critical in Ottawa's bid to win a UN Security Council seat.

Sajjan and Foreign Minter Stephane Dion have also consulted with NATO allies on a Canadian intervention in Libya. Sajjan said he had discussed the possibility of Canadian troops participating in an Italian-led military training mission with German Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen earlier this month.

Canada played a leading role in NATO's 2011 air bombardment of Libya, which led to the ouster of the Gaddafi regime and the deaths of thousands and plunged the country into an ongoing civil war. Foreign Minister Dion has said Canada is ready to send military forces to the oil-rich North African country, but not before it has a single "unity" government broadly-recognized by the western powers.

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