

Canada's elite urges Liberal government to deploy troops to Eastern Europe

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Canada's ruling elite has spoken out firmly in favour of the proposed deployment of a Canadian Armed Forces' battalion to the Baltic states and Eastern Europe as part of a 4,000-strong US-led NATO force aimed at intimidating and encircling Russia.

NATO confirmed Tuesday that it is going ahead with the new force. Its creation marks a new high point in the sustained and ever-widening campaign of pressure and provocations aimed at Moscow that began with the US-backed, fascist-led coup in Ukraine in February 2014. It will place NATO soldiers directly on Russia's borders, increasing the danger of an all-out war between nuclear-armed powers.

British Defence Minister Michael Fallon made no bones about the purpose of the deployment, stating, "That should send a very strong signal of our determination to defend the Baltic states and Poland in the face of continued Russian aggression."

The presentation of the new force as defensive is a fraud. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy in 1991, the US, with Canada's strong support, has systematically expanded NATO to include all the former members of the Warsaw Pact and the Baltic states in violation of guarantees given to Moscow.

The new force will be permanent in all but name (replacement battalions will be rotated in on a regular basis), violating yet another pledge to Moscow—that NATO forces would not be permanently deployed to countries that border Russia.

The new deployment is to be backed up by the alliance's highly mobile rapid reaction force, made up of 40,000 soldiers from NATO member states.

Announcement of the new force came as more than 30,000 troops were participating in Poland in NATO's largest war games since the Cold War, with Russia the explicit target. 220 Canadian troops, who have been deployed in Poland since 2014, are involved in Anakonda-16. It also came just three weeks ahead of a NATO summit in Warsaw at which the US-led alliance will further ratchet up tensions with Russia.

Britain, the United States and Germany, arguably NATO's most powerful members, have already announced their intention to make available 1,000 troops each for the new force, leaving a fourth "core" contributor to be found.

Reports indicate that Canada's participation has been discussed for several months, and was raised directly with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau by Polish President Andrzej Duda during an official visit to Ottawa in May. According to the *Ottawa Citizen*, the Trudeau Liberal government will make its decision on Canada's role in the new force prior to the NATO summit.

Although the potential location of the Canadian troops is yet to be confirmed, reports from diplomats have suggested they could be sent to either Latvia or Poland.

NATO is also urging Canada to retain a war ship in Europe permanently, and to continue to contribute CF-18 fighter jets to air patrols over the Baltic Sea. These patrols have repeatedly resulted in close encounters with Russian warplanes. Canada previously deployed a frigate to the Black Sea, which also participated in NATO's mission in the Aegean Sea aimed at preventing refugees from reaching Greece.

Canada has been a critical part of the US-led anti-Russian offensive in Ukraine and throughout Eastern Europe. It was a prominent funder of so-called "opposition" groups in Ukraine prior to the 2014 coup, and has been one of the far-right Kiev government's staunchest allies ever since. Former Prime Minister Stephen Harper made global headlines when he provocatively told Russian President Vladimir Putin at the G20 summit in 2014 to "get out of Ukraine."

This did not change with the election of a Liberal government in Ottawa last year. Foreign Minister Stephane Dion has pledged to implement a free trade deal with Ukraine signed by the previous Conservative government, and Canada continues to have 200 soldiers in western Ukraine training members of the armed forces and National Guard for their civil war against pro-Russian separatists.

A recently-released analysis by the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS), Canada's premier spy agency, argued for Ottawa to take urgent steps against Moscow, which it claimed is "mobilizing for war." "Russia is not modernizing its military primarily to extend its capacity to pursue hybrid warfare," wrote CSIS. "It is modernizing conventional military capability on a large scale; the state is mobilizing for war."

While the Putin regime's reactionary nationalist and militarist policies offer nothing progressive, the portrayal of

Russia as the main aggressor turns reality on its head. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy, the US-led NATO alliance has pursued an offensive policy of isolating and encircling Russia.

The annexation of Crimea by the Kremlin followed the direct intervention by Berlin and Washington to bring about a similar development in Ukraine with the installation of a pro-western puppet regime in Kiev.

The call for Canada to deploy additional forces to Eastern Europe comes as the ruling elite is mounting a sustained campaign for a major hike in military spending and the purchase of a vast array of new ships and planes so as to enable Canadian imperialism to assert its interests more aggressively around the world.

The Liberal government's Defence Policy Review is being used to argue for increasing military spending from its present level of 1 percent of GDP closer to the 2 percent advocated by NATO, as well as to press for the purchase of armed drones and Canada's participation in the US's highly destabilizing anti-ballistic missile shield.

The NATO deployment is only one of a series of new overseas Canadian military interventions under discussion. According to press reports, the Liberal government is also considering: deploying CAF troops to Libya, as part of an imperialist-led operation to prevent refugees from reaching Europe; expanding a "peacekeeping" force deployed in Egypt because of increased activity by Islamist groups; participating in the French-led military intervention in Mali; and assuming the lead role in security operations in Haiti, where Canada intervened in alliance with the US in 2004 to overthrow the elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

As soon as Canada's potential involvement in the new NATO force became public, the media went into overdrive to proclaim its full support. Canada's newspaper of record, the *Globe and Mail*, published an editorial June 9 titled "Canada should be in the new NATO force in Europe."

The editorial cited the Liberals' election platform, which called for "an agile, responsive and well-equipped military force" able to "offer international deterrence and combat capability." It concluded, "Canada's purpose in joining this long-term NATO mission would be to show our seriousness in standing with our allies," before citing the example of the thousands of Canadian troops deployed to Europe during the Cold War.

Canada's ruling elite is determined to militarily confront Russia not only in Eastern Europe, but also in other parts of the world. Earlier this year, the Liberals ordered a tripling of CAF Special Forces in Iraq and an increase in military personnel elsewhere in the Middle East in support of the US-led war for regime change in Syria. The removal of Bashar al-Assad is seen as essential to strengthening Washington's geopolitical position in the world's most important oil-producing region at the expense of its chief rivals: Russia and China.

Canada is also increasingly concerned about Russian activity in the Arctic, where Ottawa is determined to assert its claim to much of the resource riches of the Arctic Ocean under conditions where the region is opening up due to global warming.

In this context, sharp disputes have emerged between the Liberal government and leading sections of the military over plans to purchase a new fleet of fighter jets. The press reported last week that the government has decided to buy Boeing Super Hornet fighters as a temporary replacement for the current CF-18s, whose lifetime expires within the next decade.

Purchase of the Super Hornets would effectively scuttle any chance the government would follow through on the commitment of the previous Conservative government to purchase a fleet of F-35 fifth-generation stealth fighters from the US giant Lockheed Martin.

Matthew Fisher, the *National Post's* veteran foreign affairs correspondent who is well connected with the military, penned an angry denunciation of the Liberals' plans. Purchasing the Super Hornets and forsaking the F-35 would mean that "Canada will end up surrendering sovereignty of its Arctic air space to the United States Air Force in about 10 years," wrote Fisher. He claimed this would take place because, as Moscow deploys its own stealth fighters to bases in Russia's north, the US Air Force would be compelled to take control of defending the approaches to the North American continent since Canada would have no stealth planes.

Fisher raged that the government's plan to buy Super Hornets had caused "extreme disappointment and disbelief across the upper reaches of Canada's military community."

Fisher concluded his piece by making clear that the question of purchasing the F-35 was bound up with NATO plans to intensify the alliance's aggressive moves against Russia.

Citing Denmark's recent decision to purchase the aircraft and the likelihood that Finland would follow suit, Fisher declared, "If Finland follows Denmark's lead, it will become the 12th western-oriented air force in a row to choose the F-35 over the Super Hornet, with Canada the only exception. ... Is everyone who made those decisions—including those confronting similar security challenges in the Arctic—stupid? What is it that makes Canada so unique that it feels it can ignore the collective wisdom of all its allies and friends?"



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