

North American summit dominated by Brexit fallout and geopolitical rivalries

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US President Barack Obama, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau met in Ottawa yesterday for the long-delayed North American Leaders' Summit.

The meeting of the heads of government of the three North American countries, which through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) form an economic bloc, was originally slated for February 2015. But former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper put it off due to ongoing tensions with the US, principally related to the Keystone XL oil pipeline and frictions with Mexico over Canadian visa restrictions on Mexican citizens. Initiated in 2005, the North American Leaders' Summit is supposed to be an annual event, but yesterday's was the first to be hosted by Canada in almost a decade.

Up until a few days ago, the summit was to have focused on the NAFTA allies' plans to promote "competitiveness" and to leverage North America's status as an "energy superpower," under the guise of a "North American Climate, Clean Energy, and Environment Partnership." But the summit agenda was disrupted by Britain's June 23 vote to leave the European Union, the consequent gyrations on the world's currency and stock markets and widespread fears in ruling class circles, as spelled out in the *New York Times*, *Economist* and other of its leading mouthpieces, that the EU and US-led world order is unravelling.

In a move also aimed at countering US Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, who delivered an economic policy speech Tuesday denouncing NAFTA, Obama, Peña Nieto and Trudeau reaffirmed their commitment to free trade and close collaboration between the three North American countries, including in upholding "security" and "human rights"—code words for US domination—in Latin America.

At the post-summit news conference, Obama took a direct swipe at China, warning that if the three North American countries did not act together in the world, other countries in Asia would write the "rules" of global trade. He insisted that North America had to engage more, not less, in Asia, emphasizing there was joint agreement to press ahead with the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal, the economic arm of Washington's military-strategic offensive to isolate and

encircle China.

Obama seized on the occasion to denounce cheap steel imports to North America, an unmistakable reference to China. The White House media release prior to the summit spoke of the need for "robust trade enforcement" to counter "excess" steel and aluminum imports.

The North American leaders announced they had agreed to semi-annual meetings of their foreign ministers, a forum they dubbed the "North American Caucus," to further cooperation on "hemispheric" and "global" issues.

During their press conference the three leaders engaged in mutual backslapping over their purported joint commitment to human rights. Peña Nieto hailed the Obama administration's efforts to "stabilize" Central America, even though his administration has deported hundreds of thousands of Central Americans back to the hellish conditions created by decades of US-backed murderous authoritarian regimes and poverty sustained by imperialist exploitation.

Trudeau and Obama reciprocated with praise for Peña Nieto, who heads a government whose police and security forces have been implicated in killing and torturing thousands of civilians in the name of the war on drugs and massacring protesters. Predictably, there was no mention of the youth and striking teachers shot down in cold blood by federal police in Oaxaca just 10 days ago.

At a joint press conference with Peña Nieto a day prior to the summit, Trudeau announced plans for Canada to enhance security cooperation with Mexico, including instituting a training program for Mexican security forces under the guise of supporting the country's war on drugs.

After a Mexican reporter asked about the Oaxaca massacre, Trudeau made an empty expression of concern before going on to agree with Peña Nieto that it is necessary to maintain a "rules-based" order. The Mexican president explicitly linked this expression to a denunciation of the protesters, effectively blaming them for the massacre because they were opposing a reactionary law.

The headline "takeaway" of yesterday's summit was a commitment to align North American energy policy with the aim of obtaining 50 percent of all electricity from "clean energy sources" by 2025. Such sources include nuclear,

renewable energy, carbon capture and storage, and increased energy efficiency.

The “clean energy partnership” is being touted by the media as a triumph in the face of resurgent economic nationalism and division in Europe. “We will streamline the flow of legitimate goods and trusted travelers across our borders, promote cleaner air and waterways, and work towards a competitive, low-carbon and sustainable North American economy that creates good, middle class jobs for our citizens,” declared Trudeau.

In truth, the integration of North American energy policy is a stratagem of the US and Canadian ruling elites. Not only do they view the development of “clean energy” as a huge profit-making opportunity for big business for years and decades to come. They are anxious to make use of North America’s newfound status, thanks to shale and tar-sands oil and gas, as a net-energy-exporting region to provide them leverage in the global struggle for profits, markets and geo-strategic advantage.

Big business in the US and Canada are especially keen to gain access to Mexico’s energy sector. A recent report by the Centre for International Governance Innovation, a Canadian think tank, enthused that Mexico is seeking investment totaling \$300 billion by 2018 in a number of sectors as a result of Peña Nieto’s neo-liberal “Pact for Mexico,” and pointed out that the country’s oil pipeline network is only one-tenth as large as that of Texas. Firms such as TransCanada, which was behind the failed Keystone pipeline, already have a presence in Mexico and are set to reap major benefits from the integration of North America’s energy sector.

Obama also used his visit to Canada to pressure Ottawa, for decades one of the US’s closest military-strategic partners, to do more to assist the US in its drive to assert global hegemony through aggression and war.

In a speech delivered to Canada’s parliament late Wednesday afternoon, Obama urged Canada to increase military spending and commit more resources to NATO. “As your ally and as your friend, let me say that we’ll be more secure when every NATO member including Canada contributes its full share to our common security,” said Obama. This was a thinly veiled rebuke of Ottawa for not doubling its current military budget of \$18 billion so as to meet NATO’s demand that its member states spend the equivalent of 2 percent of GDP on their militaries. “Because the Canadian Armed Forces are really good,” continued Obama, “if I can borrow a phrase, the world needs more Canada. NATO needs more Canada.”

The US has been urging Canada to become the fourth “lead state” in implementing NATO’s plan to permanently deploy forces on Russia’s border by stationing a 4,000-strong “advanced force” in the Baltic States and Poland. As Obama was travelling to Ottawa, the *Toronto Star* reported that a senior Canadian official had confirmed that Canada will soon announce that it is complying with the US request and will be sending hundreds of troops to Latvia. According to the *Star*, its source said the “deployment to Latvia will be ‘essentially

permanent, unless and until Russia changes its posture in the region’.”

The “Three Amigos” summit also touched on military-security issues. The US, Canada and Mexico agreed to expand cooperation in “peacekeeping” operations, specifically in the wake of the agreement to end the decades-long civil war in Colombia. Background documents obtained by CBC confirmed that Mexico intends to send observers as part of a UN mission to the country and that the US is pressing Canada for assistance in coordinating “peacekeeping” missions—that is, military interventions aimed at enforcing imperialist-sponsored “regime change” operations or “stabilization” agreements—around the world.

The Trudeau government is currently considering assuming command of the UN force that was deployed to Haiti in 2004 after Canadian and US troops intervened to oust the country’s elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Following his bilateral discussions Tuesday with Peña Nieto, Trudeau announced that Canada will assist Mexico in creating a “peacekeeping” training center to prepare its military forces for participation in UN missions.

To “reset” Canadian-Mexican relations, Trudeau pledged to remove the visa restrictions on Mexicans by December 1, while Peña Nieto agreed to lift restrictions on Canadian beef imports imposed due to an outbreak of Mad Cow Disease in 2003.

Discussions have been ongoing within Canadian ruling circles for some time about the desirability of improving relations with Mexico, so as to counter the rise of protectionism in the US. Both governments were shocked when in the final stages of the TPP negotiations the US struck a deal with Japan behind their backs that rolled back protections for the North American auto industry.

Canadian media commentators noted that with Trump threatening to tear up NAFTA and Democratic frontrunner Hillary Clinton also striking a protectionist pose ahead of November’s election, an alliance with Mexico could prove critical in preserving the countries’ largely unfettered access to the US market. Both the Mexican and Canadian ruling elites are heavily dependent on the export of goods and services to the US.



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