

Canada expands role in US-led offensives on three fronts

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While attending NATO's two-day summit in Warsaw last weekend, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that Canada is increasing its participation in US-led military operations in eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East.

The summit marked a major escalation of NATO's military build-up against, and encirclement of, Russia. The decision to deploy 4,000 troops to Poland and the three Baltic States—Latvia, Lithuania and Poland—comes in the wake of NATO's creation of a Rapid Response Force capable of deploying up to 40,000 soldiers to the region in a matter of days.

All of this has been justified on the basis of the fraudulent claim that Russia is acting as an “aggressor.” In reality, it was the Western-backed, fascist-led coup in Ukraine in February 2014 that initiated the current stand-off, and it is NATO that over the past quarter century has systematically expanded, incorporating almost all of eastern Europe up to Russia's borders.

The latest moves heighten the risk of a clash between nuclear-armed powers, provoked either intentionally or through miscalculation—a clash that could quickly spiral into a broader regional and global conflagration with catastrophic consequences.

Trudeau confirmed that Canada will deploy at least 450 troops to Latvia as part of Canada's commitment to lead one of the four forward battlegroups NATO is establishing in the Baltic Republics and Poland. The other three are to be led by the US, Britain, and Germany.

Canada will also support NATO's anti-Russia campaign by deploying six CF-18 fighter jets and a naval frigate to surveille Russia's borders. Canadian frigates have participated in NATO's Operation Reassurance since 2014, mounting exercises in the Black Sea and intervening in the Aegean Sea to block refugees from reaching Europe.

Canadian forces will have responsibility for commanding the multinational force in Latvia, including providing its headquarters and “essential support units.” Ottawa's lead role was made public just 24 hours after US President

Barack Obama delivered a speech to the Canadian parliament in which he suggested Ottawa's military budget is too small and repeatedly called for “more Canada” in NATO and the world—that is, more Canadian military engagement.

The “open-ended” Latvia deployment comes on top of the 200 Canadian troops stationed in Poland since 2014 to conduct war preparations with NATO colleagues, and a further 200 troops dispatched to western Ukraine to train the country's army and national guard for their war against pro-Russian separatists.

Trudeau followed up his participation at the NATO summit with a two-day visit to Ukraine. There he held talks with President Petro Poroshenko, signed a free trade agreement, and discussed the possibility of Canada supplying offensive weapons to the Kiev regime.

The Trudeau government's official statement on the NATO meeting pointed to the broader strategic considerations behind Ottawa's decision to also expand its support for the US-led wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East. “Canada,” it proclaimed, “worked closely with our allies” to deal with “Russia's interference in Ukraine, and the arc of instability across the Middle East and North Africa.”

Canada will participate in a new NATO counter-improvised explosive device (CIED) capacity-building force for Iraq, which will train forces loyal to the US-backed government in Baghdad how to detect and disable CIEDs. With this force, the NATO alliance is taking a direct role in the US-led Mideast war, which from the outset has been directed at bringing about regime change in Syria so as to weaken Russia and Iran and consolidate US hegemony over the world's most important oil-producing region. Canada's involvement in the NATO CIED mission is in addition to its deployment of 200 Special Forces in northern Iraq on the frontlines with Kurdish Peshmerga fighters and the deployment of 600 military personnel elsewhere in the region to provide command and control support to the US's anti-ISIS coalition.

In the immediate aftermath of President Obama's announcement of an extension of US troop deployments to Afghanistan, Trudeau pledged almost half a billion dollars in aid to the impoverished Central Asian country. Approximately half of this will go to fund the Afghan security forces tasked with propping up the hated US puppet regime in Kabul.

Canada has played a critical role in maintaining the US-led neo-colonial occupation of Afghanistan. For six years beginning in 2005, Canadian forces led counterinsurgency activities in Kandahar, a Taliban stronghold.

The latest announcements mean that Canada's ruling elite and its military are integrating themselves even more fully into the military-strategic offensives Washington is mounting around the world to shore up its global hegemony. During their nine months in office, Trudeau and his Liberals have moved aggressively to fulfill their promise to deepen Canadian imperialism's longstanding strategic partnership with the US. This has included significantly expanding troop commitments to eastern Europe and the Mideast war, and increasing Canada's support for Washington's anti-China "pivot," including by strengthening military-security collaboration with Japan and the Philippines.

More is to come. Upon announcing Canada's new NATO commitments, government officials emphasized that they do not constitute a barrier to deploying Canadian Armed Forces' troops on one or more "peacekeeping" missions in West Africa or Haiti. A spokeswoman for Foreign Minister Stephane Dion told the *Huffington Post* on Tuesday that the government still intends to "re-energize" Canadian leadership in key areas of the world through sponsoring UN-endorsed military interventions.

In spite of the Trudeau government's overseas military deployments, much of the corporate media is dissatisfied, arguing that Canada should assume greater "responsibility" in sustaining the US-led capitalist world order. Commentators from the *National Post* and *Globe and Mail* have railed against Canada's C\$20.3 billion defence budget, terming it woefully inadequate.

Writing in the July 9 *National Post*, Matthew Fisher complained that when it comes to military spending, Canada is "by far the worst offender in the (NATO) alliance." An earlier piece by Fisher dismissed the deployment to Latvia as a "tiny Canadian force."

Meanwhile, in the *Globe*, Derek Burney and Fen Osler Hampson attacked the Obama administration for not having followed through on its 2013 threat to attack Syria and described NATO's military build-up against Russia as a "feeble effort to counter Russia's blatant violations of international law." Turning reality on its head, they dismissed NATO's "track record to date" as "not

encouraging. ... Whether in the Middle East, Afghanistan or in Eastern Europe, the Western alliance is on its back foot."

Canada's military-security establishment and media are clamoring for a doubling of military spending so as to meet the NATO target of a defence budget equivalent to at least 2 percent of GDP. In order to prepare the political terrain for military spending hikes, the purchase of new war ships and fighter aircraft, a more "interventionist" foreign policy and Canada's participation in the US's anti-ballistic missile shield, the Liberals have initiated a "public" defence policy review.

Predictably, the opposition parties have endorsed Canada's enhanced role in NATO's military mobilization against Russia. The Official Opposition Conservatives, who under Prime Minister Harper were among the staunchest international supporters of Ukraine's ultra-nationalist government, were quick to declare their full support for Canada assuming charge of the Latvia-based advanced combat force.

In an opinion piece for the liberal *Toronto Star*, New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Thomas Mulcair also welcomed the deployment as a means of countering the "significant" Russian "threat" to eastern Europe. "Showing unity and strength from NATO," wrote Mulcair, "sends an important signal to any Russian decision-maker that these incursions are unacceptable."

His position is in line with the NDP's longstanding support for Canadian imperialism's intervention in eastern Europe and Ukraine. In 2015, the NDP strongly backed the Harper government's decision to send Canadian military trainers to Ukraine.

Mulcair's sole criticism of Trudeau's Warsaw announcement was that he should have consulted with the opposition parties before giving an "open-ended" commitment to maintaining Canadian forces in Latvia and that his government should combine military steps with increased diplomatic and political efforts aimed at bringing about a resolution to the Ukraine crisis. Lest anyone think he was calling for a "softer" line toward Moscow, Mulcair chastized Trudeau for not imposing tougher economic sanctions against Russia.



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