

Canada seeks enhanced military-security collaboration with Trump-led US

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In the week since the inauguration of US President Donald Trump and the promulgation of his reactionary “America First” program, Canada’s Liberal government has moved to significantly expand Ottawa’s decades-long military-security partnership with the United States.

Under conditions where Trump is launching trade war, talking about “seizing Iraqi oil,” and threatening to seize Chinese-held islands in the South China Sea, Canada’s ruling elite is seeking to further integrate Canada into Washington’s war plans.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau spoke to Trump by telephone the day after the inauguration and discussed an initial face-to-face meeting in coming weeks. In a tacit acknowledgement that a closer alliance with Trump will prove deeply unpopular, Canadian officials have proposed that the meeting take place on US soil, for fear a Trump visit to Ottawa will provoke mass protests.

In the run-up to Trump’s assumption of the presidency, Trudeau had signalled his government’s desire to step up military collaboration with Washington by a series of key personnel appointments. Following a cabinet shuffle that saw former financial journalist and Thomson-Reuters executive Chrystia Freeland promoted to Foreign Minister, Trudeau named Andrew Leslie, a retired lieutenant-general and onetime candidate to lead Canada’s military, as Freeland’s parliamentary secretary with special responsibilities for the Canada-US relationship.

Leslie has intimate ties to the Pentagon, including from when he commanded Canadian forces in the US-led wars in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan.

Speaking to the *Globe and Mail* earlier this week, Leslie hailed Trump’s selections for Defence Secretary and National Security Adviser, James “Mad Dog” Mattis and Michael Flynn. “Gen. Mattis,” declared Leslie, “is a very knowledgeable, scholarly warrior, and Gen. Flynn is arguably one of the world’s experts on intelligence. So they’re unique choices.”

Such effusive praise for Mattis, who was responsible for the brutal 2004 US military assault on Fallujah, a war crime,

and Flynn, an aggressive proponent of US militarist violence in the Middle East and beyond, exemplifies the Canadian ruling elite’s readiness to collaborate with the most right-wing US administration in history in pursuit of its own predatory ambitions. As another anonymous senior government official enthusiastically remarked of Trump’s team, “Actually, we’re getting along quite well with these guys...They are saying very nice things to us. They are saying they love Canada.”

Canada has long been a key partner in US imperialist aggression. Since World War II, Ottawa has relied on its close ties to Washington to advance Canadian imperialist interests around the globe. In the explosion of US militarism that followed the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the Soviet Union, Canada played a prominent role. Canada’s military has participated in virtually every US-led war over the past quarter century and Ottawa, under Liberal and Conservative governments alike, has been particularly supportive of the US military-strategic offensive against Russia, from NATO expansion to the current “advanced” deployments on Russia’s borders.

Trudeau pledged in his 2015 election campaign to deepen the economic and military partnership between the two countries. The coming to power of Trump has added a still more ominous edge to this strategy.

Trump’s provocative declarations, that the US is being “ripped off” by NATO and that some member-states are “free riders” because they do not spend the equivalent of 2 percent of GDP on their militaries, have largely been welcomed by Canada’s political and military establishment. To reach the 2 percent target, the Liberals would have to double the current military budget to more than \$40 billion.

There is also a growing clamour for Canada to join the US ballistic missile defence shield, a step that is already under consideration as part of the Liberals’ defence policy review.

Speaking with the CBC this week, Derek Burney, a former Canadian ambassador to the US who is advising Trudeau on working with Trump, said, “(Trump’s) criticism of Canada’s contribution to NATO is legitimate. We’re not

alone, but if he's concerned the United States is carrying an unfair share of the burden, he's right. We should be spending more on defence if we want to give future life to NATO."

Colin Robertson, a former diplomat and now a senior fellow at the Canadian Global Affairs Institute, enthused over the prospect of Trump giving Canada encouragement to take a more aggressive stance against Russia in the Arctic. "I think Trump will probably say 'OK, the Arctic is yours. Exercise that sovereignty. Are you going to build that base in the north or not? We want to know what you're doing.'"

In a concession to Trump, the Trudeau government has delayed finalizing its plans to deploy Canadian troops to Africa. This initiative was to be dressed up as a UN "peacekeeping mission," but would have as its principal goal giving Ottawa a greater role in the geopolitics of a continent where Canadian mining companies have more than \$25 billion in investments. Made in expectation of demands from the Trump administration for additional Canadian military commitments, the delay has reportedly riled the French and German governments. They had been banking on Canada deploying hundreds of troops to Mali early in 2017 to assist in the waging of counterinsurgency war.

With the exception of British Prime Minister Theresa May, the rulers of Europe's major powers have responded to Trump's economic nationalism and unilateralism by pushing back against Washington and calling for a more assertive and independent European foreign policy. Trudeau and Canadian big business, on the other hand, are bending over backwards to demonstrate their readiness to collaborate with a Trump-led America. "It is the job of the Canadian prime minister," declared Trudeau this week, "to have a constructive working relationship with the president of the United States, and that's exactly what I intend to do."

Burney and senior government officials have made no secret of the fact that in renegotiating NAFTA with Trump, Canada will be quite prepared to throw Mexico under the bus if that is necessary to maintain Canadian big business' privileged access to the US market. "Mexico has its own interests," Burney told CTV News. "The notion that Canada and Mexico together are going to negotiate against the United States, that doesn't hold any water for me."

Trudeau was in Calgary this week for a two-day cabinet retreat at which relations with the Trump administration were the main topic of discussion. The Prime Minister and Natural Resources Minister Jim Carr applauded Trump's executive order Tuesday giving the go-ahead for the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, which will transport Alberta tar sands oil to the Gulf of Mexico.

All this does not mean relations between the US and Canadian governments and ruling elites are not fraught with

tensions. Canadian big business is troubled by its dependence on the US, particularly in the area of oil exports, and is urging Ottawa to proceed with its plans to diversify Canada's trade. These plans include potentially striking a free trade agreement with China. Such a step would almost inevitably put Canada at odds with Trump, who has all but publicly named China as America's principal economic and military rival.

Frictions could also emerge over how to deal with Russia, if Trump seeks an accommodation with Moscow so as to lay the basis for escalating Washington's military-strategic offensive against China.

Some media commentators are keenly aware that in aligning with Trump, Trudeau is bolstering an administration whose aggressive policies threaten to plunge the world into trade war and potentially a global conflagration. However, bereft of any alternative strategy for defending the wealth and privileges of Canadian capitalism, they are cheering Trudeau on.

Thus, *National Post* columnist Michael Den Tandt, who has praised Trudeau's overtures to Trump, published a column this week, "Batten the hatches: China and US poised to clash as never before," that outlined a scenario of military conflict in the Asia-Pacific. Wrote Den Tandt: "All the signals coming from senior Trump administration officials—from the president himself, with his Taiwan-friendly Tweets, on down—are not of waning interest in the Pacific region, but waxing. Only rather than the softish power of multilateral trade ties, the primary instrument of American power projection will be military—aircraft carriers and nuclear deterrence."



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