

Trump and Trudeau reaffirm “indispensable” Canada-US alliance

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Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau travelled to Washington yesterday for his first face-to-face discussions with US President Donald Trump. At their conclusion, Trudeau and Trump vowed to enhance the longstanding military-security and economic partnership between the Canadian and US ruling elites, by intensifying their joint war preparations and by integrating Canada into an aggressive US-led North American trade bloc.

The joint statement that Trudeau and Trump issued at the end of three hours of meetings and a working lunch declared, “no two countries share deeper or broader relations.” It then went on to outline plans for closer collaboration, including in “growing our economies,” “energy security” and “border security.” In its most significant section, the statement stressed the joint military operations of Canada and the US. It declared the two countries “indispensable allies in the defense of North America and other parts of the world, through NATO” and—in a reference to Canada’s role in the US war in the Middle East and support for the US military build-up against China in the Asia Pacific—“other multilateral efforts.”

The statement pledged that Ottawa and Washington “will work to modernize and broaden our NORAD [North American Aerospace Defense Command] Partnership.” It also praised Canada’s plans to buy new fighter jets and its leading role in the US-led campaign of NATO aggression against Russia. Canada is leading one of four “forward deployed” NATO battalions on Russia’s borders in the Baltic States and Poland.

At their joint press conference, both Trump and Trudeau emphasized that the Canada-US partnership was forged in war, with Trudeau making specific reference to the two imperialist world wars of the last century, the Korean War and the Afghan War.

“American and Canadian troops,” declared Trump, “have gone to battle together, fought wars together and forged the special bonds that come when two nations have shed their blood together.”

The militarist tone reached a highpoint, when Trump, after sharply denouncing North Korea for its missile launch over the weekend, declared, “We have problems just about everywhere around the globe.”

Trudeau, who with the support of the trade unions won

election little more than a year ago by appealing to popular anger with Stephen Harper’s hard-right Conservative government, was at pains to praise Trump and demonstrate his government’s eagerness to work in close collaboration with the most right-wing administration in American history—an administration that in the name of “America First” intends to wage trade war and massively expand US imperialist violence.

The prominence given NORAD in the joint statement is especially ominous.

The *Globe and Mail* reported on Monday that it is highly likely that Canada will soon fulfill a longstanding Pentagon demand and join the US ballistic missile defense shield. Its name notwithstanding, the shield’s ultimate goal is to make it possible for Washington to wage a “winnable” nuclear war with Russia, China, or any other geopolitical rival. Canada’s participation in the shield would be through NORAD, which was already expanded in 2006 to include a maritime surveillance function.

An unnamed senior government official told the *Globe*, “NORAD is the only joint-command relationship in the world. And we have to modernize it and whether that is missile [defence] or whether it is cybersecurity, it is an opportunity to begin to try to draw them out in terms of their thinking [on reforming NORAD] before we finalize our defence policy review.”

The strengthened Canada-US military partnership will be underpinned by a more vigorous assertion of the two imperialist powers’ economic interests through an aggressive North American trade bloc, whether under the banner of the current North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) or a new alliance.

In his opening remarks to Monday’s press conference, Trump called for Canada and the US to “join forces in matters of international commerce,” and “co-ordinate closely...to protect jobs in our hemisphere and keep wealth on our continent, and to keep everyone safe.”

When Trudeau, in answer to a question about NAFTA, spoke of the importance of Canada-US trade to both countries’ economies, Trump emphatically added, “I agree with you 100 percent.”

Later, in answer to a Canadian reporter’s question, Trump

said that the changes the US will be seeking from Canada in the renegotiation of NAFTA will be “tweaks,” while emphasizing this will not be true of Mexico. Drawing a sharp contrast between US trade relations with Canada and Mexico, Trump declared, “On the southern [border], for many, many years, the transaction was not fair to the United States. It was an extremely unfair transaction,” then added, “Our relationship with Canada is outstanding.”

The prospect of reopening NAFTA has for months caused great trepidation within Canada’s business elite and political establishment. Weeks ago, the Trudeau government made clear that it is more than ready to throw Mexico to the wolves if this is the price that must be paid for maintaining Canada’s privileged access to the US market.

In the lead-up to Trudeau’s White House visit, the Canadian media and political establishment overwhelmingly endorsed his policy of bending over backwards to seek an accommodation with Trump.

Underscoring the broad support within the ruling elite for close cooperation with Trump, Conservative Party leader Rona Ambrose sent a letter to Trudeau in which she proposed a “bipartisan” effort to find common ground with the new president. Former Progressive Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney has for weeks been working informally on behalf of the Trudeau government, using his friendship with Trump and several of his billionaire cabinet ministers to make the case that the Canada-US alliance is a major asset for Washington and Wall Street on the world stage.

Trudeau has further demonstrated his commitment to align Canada with the most right-wing administration in US history in comments he made to European leaders, many of whom have advocated a more assertive European foreign policy, so as to act more independently of, and even directly confront, Washington. In conversations with British Prime Minister Theresa May and French President Francois Hollande last week, Trudeau, reports the Canadian Press, stressed that Ottawa is “mindful that it is at the start of a four-year relationship with the new president,” and needs, given the interdependence of the Canada-US economies, to “engage constructively with Trump.”

Despite this, the media has sought to portray Trudeau as having sharp ideological differences with the US President and made much of a hypocritical, ostensibly “pro-refugee” tweet Canada’s prime minister issued the day Trump’s illegal and discriminatory travel ban on people from seven predominantly Muslim counties came into force. The *Washington Post* hailed Trudeau as “a leader of the liberal global resistance to President Trump.”

Yesterday, the media was playing up a new bilateral initiative, suggested by Canada, one that aptly sums up the “progressive” character of his Liberal government: the establishment of a “Canada-United States Council for Advancement of Women Entrepreneurs and Business Leaders.”

The Council was kicked off at a meeting attended by Trump, Trudeau, Ivanka Trump, and other female executives, including General Motors CEO Mary Barra, and Linda Hasenfratz, the CEO and principal shareholder of the Canadian-based auto parts transnational Linamar.

At Monday’s press conference, Trudeau, while looking visibly uncomfortable, studiously avoided criticizing any of Trump’s reactionary anti-immigrant measures, even after the US president ranted on about them at length. Even when specifically asked, Canada’s prime minister did not refer directly to the travel ban targeting immigrants, refugees, and travellers from seven majority-Muslim countries. Instead, he emphasized Canada’s commitment to “secure borders,” which the joint statement described as a “top priority.”

All that being said, relations between Canada and the US are fraught with tension and potential conflicts. The Trudeau government, for example, has identified expanding trade ties with China as key to its “growth” strategy; yet the Trump administration has made clear it considers China a “currency manipulator” and the principal threat to US global dominance.

The determination of Trudeau and the Canadian ruling class to partner with Trump will incite mass popular opposition. Tradition has it that a US President’s first foreign visit is to Ottawa, but Trudeau chose to travel to Washington for fear that the mass protests that would have greeted Trump on his arrival in Canada would have marred their first meeting.

Trudeau’s evident nervousness during the press conference as Trump vehemently defended his brutal anti-immigrant measures reflects the Liberal Prime Minister’s awareness that such an open association with a right-wing demagogue and authoritarian will impact on his own standing and fuel popular opposition to his government’s right-wing agenda of austerity at home and increased military interventions in partnership with the US around the globe.



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