

War must be part of Canada's future, foreign minister declares

Roger Jordan
8 June 2017

The speech delivered by Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland in the House of Commons Tuesday marks a major escalation in the Liberal government's efforts to aggressively assert Canadian imperialist interests on the world stage. Rhetorical flourishes about democratic values and human rights were aimed at diverting attention away from the core message: Canada must resort to "hard power," i.e. war, to defend its interests, maintain its strategic partnership with US imperialism, and vastly expand military spending.

Freeland's speech set the stage for Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan's presentation of Canada's new defence policy yesterday. Titled "Strong, Secure, Engaged," the policy calls for a \$64 billion increase in military spending over the next 20 years, including \$6 billion more in the next five years. Canada's armed forces are to gain 5,000 new troops and to be equipped with 88 new fighter jets, rather than the 67 the previous Conservative government had proposed.

Freeland began her remarks by acknowledging the growing crisis of the US-led global "liberal" order, due to "threats," including "Russian expansionism" and a rising China, protectionism and the threat of all-out trade war, and tensions between the US and Europe, including over NATO.

Less than two weeks prior to her remarks, US President Donald Trump had clashed with European heads of government at the G7 summit in Italy and NATO meeting in Brussels over issues including trade, climate change, and NATO members' commitment to spend 2 percent of GDP on defence.

The European powers, led by Germany, have responded to Trump's "America First" economic nationalism and bellicose militarism by seizing the opportunity to advance their own imperialist interests. Leading German politicians and daily newspapers have called for Berlin to assert its economic and geopolitical ambitions independently of, and if necessary in opposition to, Washington, including by creating a European military force capable of acting on its own on the global stage.

These developments represent a dilemma for the Canadian bourgeoisie. It has relied on its strategic partnership with the US to exert global influence. At the same time, Canada, as a lesser imperialist power, has used multilateral institutions such as NATO, the G7 and UN—institutions which are now breaking apart—to offset the imbalance of power between Ottawa and Washington, and to advance Canadian imperialist ambitions around the globe.

Freeland sought to resolve this conundrum by pledging Canada's firm allegiance to the United States, while also giving a commitment to work to uphold and revive post-war "Transatlantic" and "multilateral" institutions. In effect, she proposed Canada serve as a bridge between the US and Europe.

In contrast to the sharp criticisms German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron have made of Trump in recent days, Freeland did not mention the US president by name. Instead, she paid gushing tribute to US imperialism's role in establishing the post-war order, declaring at one point, "[I]n blood, in treasure, in strategic vision, in leadership, America has paid the lion's share. The United States has truly been the indispensable nation." Underscoring her point, her speech referred proudly to Canada's involvement in a series of brutal US-led wars stretching back seven decades: from the Korean War to the Gulf War, the NATO war against Yugoslavia, the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, and the current war in Iraq.

Freeland's enthusiasm for Canada's engagement in military aggression was not limited to the past. As she bluntly declared in one of the speech's most striking passages, "Canadian diplomacy and development sometimes require the backing of hard power. Force is of course always a last resort. But the principled use of force, together with our allies and governed by international law, is part of our history and must be part of our future."

The Foreign Minister's audience did not have long to wait to discover which countries the Trudeau Liberal government considers as candidates for potential military action. "The dictatorship in North Korea, crimes against humanity in Syria, the monstrous extremists of Daesh, and Russian military adventurism and expansionism ... all pose clear strategic threats to the liberal democratic world, including Canada," proclaimed Freeland.

Canada has aligned itself closely with the US in the deliberate escalation of tensions with Russia since 2014, when the Western powers orchestrated a coup in Kiev so as to install a far-right, anti-Russian regime on Moscow's doorstep. Canada continues to deploy 200 military personnel to train Ukrainian Army and National Guard units in the country, and is sending 450 troops to Latvia to lead one of the four "forward" deployed battalions NATO is placing on Russia's borders. Freeland lauded both initiatives.

However, the reference to Russian "adventurism and expansionism" in a speech that also called for Canada to employ "hard power" when necessary marks a further escalation of

tensions.

The Trudeau government, while doing everything it can to establish a cooperative relationship with the new Trump administration, has repeatedly signaled its full-throated support for the virulently anti-Russia campaign that the Democratic Party and Republicans like John McCain have mounted in league with the US military and intelligence services. Using unsubstantiated allegations of Russian interference in the US elections, the goal of this propaganda offensive is to force Trump to continue the military-strategic offensive against Moscow mounted by the Obama administration.

Beyond Eastern Europe, Freeland's reference to Syria shows that Canada is determined to challenge Russia further afield. Canadian troops and reconnaissance aircraft are already engaged in the Mideast war in close collaboration with US forces. Waged in the name of combatting terrorism, the latest US Mideast war is aimed at imposing regime change in Syria, Russia's closest ally in the region. This was underscored by Freeland's reference to "crimes against humanity in Syria"—claims that have repeatedly been made by the western media to provide a pretext for US military action directly targeting the Syrian government.

With the Syrian conflict evolving ever more openly into a direct clash between US imperialism and Russia and Iran, Freeland's remarks demonstrate that Canada is ready to commit "blood and treasure" to ensure its share of influence in the world's most important oil-producing region.

Freeland's speech was laden with the rhetoric about defending human rights and democratic values that the Liberals, since their October 2015 election victory, have used to try to overcome overwhelming popular opposition to war and military aggression.

She placed great emphasis on the need to support "the rules-based international order and all its institutions." This meant backing "multilateral forums" like NATO, the G7, UN, and the Francophonie.

Freeland lamented that "our friend and ally (i.e. the US) has come to question the very worth of its mantle of global leadership," by which she means its turning away from these international institutions in favor of a more unilateralist and aggressive course. She stressed that Canada would "continue to seek to persuade our (American) friends that their continued international leadership is very much in their national interest—as well as that of the rest of the free world."

But she went on to argue that even as Canada seeks to deepen its partnership with the US, the crisis in the "liberal" order requires that Canada play a larger role in global affairs. It must set its "own clear and sovereign course" and this requires expanding its military capacities to play a major role in global conflicts.

In a pointed comment directed at Trump's refusal to reaffirm US support for NATO's Article 5 (which stipulates that all members come to the defence of any NATO state under attack), Freeland insisted that the Article 5 is at the very "heart of Canada's national security policy."

Freeland sought to combine this pledge to uphold the world's most powerful military alliance with rhetoric about Canada's commitment to altruism and human rights, including women's rights—the bogus humanitarian claims that have become standard

justifications for imperialist war over the past quarter century.

Under this "humanitarian" cover and amid fatuous claims about the need to uphold "peace and stability," Freeland outlined the Liberals' plans for a vast expansion of the Canadian military. Canada would "make the necessary investments in our military," she declared, "to not only redress years of neglect and underfunding, but also to place the Canadian Armed Forces on a new footing—with the equipment, training, resources and consistent, predictable financing they need to do their difficult, dangerous and important work."

In additions to their differences over NATO, Canada's Liberal government and the Trump administration don't see eye-to-eye on China. While Trump has attacked Beijing as a currency manipulator and continued the economic and military offensive Obama initiated against China through his "Pivot to Asia" policy, the Liberal government in Ottawa holds out hope of reaching a free trade agreement with China and making it a major market for Canadian oil and energy exports.

Notwithstanding Freeland's more conciliatory tone towards Beijing, her speech made clear that if forced to choose, Ottawa will side with the US in confronting China. China's increasing economic power was identified by Freeland as one of the two most important "threats" to global stability and she denounced North Korea, which is being targeted by the US as a way to step up pressure on China. In April, Defence Minister Sajjan indicated that Canada could be drawn into war with Pyongyang in alliance with the US.

Having pointed to Canada's main geopolitical adversaries and advocated a program of militarism and war in response, Freeland was compelled to mention the chief obstacle to this reactionary agenda: popular opposition driven by deepening social inequality.

A "great challenge" said Freeland, is "exhaustion in the West of the belief among working people, the middle class, that the globalized system can help them better their lives. This is an enormous crisis of confidence. It has the potential, if we let it, to undermine global prosperity itself." Here Canada's Foreign Minister is not speaking of the "prosperity" of working people, which has been ravaged by three decades of capitalist restructuring and the assault on public services and worker rights; but rather the wealth, power, and global interests of the Canadian bourgeoisie.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact