

Canada to hike military spending by 70 percent over next decade

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Canadian Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan presented a new defence policy Wednesday that calls for \$62 billion in additional military spending over the next two decades. Coming just a day after Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland declared that Canada must use “hard power,” the massive rearmament program makes clear that the Liberal government is determined to wage war in pursuit of Canadian imperialism’s global interests and ambitions.

The new defence policy calls for an additional 5,000 troops, the purchase of 88 fighter jets rather than the 65 proposed by the previous government, 15 new warships, the purchase of armed drones for surveillance and combat, and billions of dollars’ worth of additional armored and supply vehicles for the army. Under the policy, Canada’s military will also develop a team of cybersecurity experts to conduct offensive online “disruption” activities.

More than a year in the making, the Liberal government’s defence policy includes a 73 percent hike in military spending over the next decade. In dollar terms, the defence budget will climb from its current level of \$18.9 billion to \$32.7 billion in 2026-27. Most of the new funds are penciled in following 2021, but even before then, billions more will be spent on improving Canada’s war capabilities. The increases will, according to the government’s estimates, increase the defence budget to 1.4 percent of GDP, still below the NATO target of 2 percent.

There can be no doubting the aggressive intent behind the spending hikes. In her speech Tuesday, Freeland reaffirmed Canada’s commitment to its strategic partnership with US imperialism and listed a series of potential adversaries, including North Korea, Syria, and Russia. She insisted Ottawa is determined to fulfill its obligations to NATO, including a pledge to abide by Article 5 commitments, which calls upon NATO members to come to the aid of an alliance partner if they are attacked.

Freeland invoked Canada’s role in the two imperialist wars of the first half of the 20th century and paid tribute to US imperialism for committing the necessary “blood and treasure” to stabilize the global “order” in the post-war era.

She also pledged that Canada would strive to uphold multilateral military alliances and institutions like NATO, through which it has exerted its influence for decades. (See: “War must be part of Canada’s future, foreign minister declares”)

Sajjan spoke in a similar vein, making clear that if Canada is to advance its imperialist interests on the global stage, it requires a strong military capable of intervening and waging war around the world. “If we’re serious about our role in the world, we must be serious about funding our military,” he declared.

Since coming to power in 2015, the Liberal government has regularly criticized its Conservative predecessor for underfunding the military. Prime Minister Stephen Harper, whose bellicose rhetoric portrayed Canada as a “warrior nation” and who oversaw Canadian participation in the Afghan, Libyan and Syrian/Iraqi conflicts, proved incapable of expanding the resources at the disposal of the military due to deep popular opposition. As he was compelled to acknowledge in 2014, when he formally committed Canada at a NATO summit to meet the 2 percent GDP military spending target, his government would struggle to achieve that goal because Canadians would “not understand” why it was necessary.

The Conservatives’ failure to make good on their aggressive rhetoric was a significant factor in the rallying of decisive sections of the ruling elite behind Justin Trudeau and his Liberals in the 2015 federal election. Their hope was that a Liberal government, dressed up as “progressive” by the trade unions and pseudo-left, would have the necessary public legitimacy to carry through unpopular defence spending hikes by concealing them behind rhetorical flourishes about democratic values and human rights.

The Liberals have not only formally pledged to carry this out with their “fully-costed” rearmament plan. They have expanded and extended Canadian military interventions around the world. In Eastern Europe, where Canada is playing a central role in the US-led NATO build-up to encircle and isolate Russia, Canada is leading one of the

alliance's "forward deployed" battalions and also has 200 troops in Ukraine training the country's army and National Guard to fight pro-Russian separatists. In the Middle East, the Liberals have expanded Canada's participation in the US war in Iraq and Syria, including by tripling the number of Special Forces personnel on the ground. And in April, Sajjan said Canada was ready to join the US in a reckless military conflict with North Korea, which would threaten to draw in China and the other major powers in a catastrophic military clash.

Under the Liberals' defence policy, Canada's Special Forces are to be increased by 25 percent to 2,500 troops. This is highly significant, because the Special Forces have repeatedly spearheaded Canada's overseas military interventions. The Special Forces personnel deployed to Iraq since 2014 have sometimes engaged in frontline combat alongside the Kurdish Peshmerga and have been active in Mosul, where the Iraqi army's brutal offensive to clear ISIS from the city has led to the deaths of thousands of civilians.

The procurement of armed drones also points to a major escalation in Canadian military violence. When this issue was first raised during the government's defence policy review, it provoked some media comment, principally driven by fear of a public backlash given the association of armed drones with the US policy, initiated under Obama, of White House-ordered extrajudicial killings. But the announcement that the Canadian Armed Forces will operate similar killing machines was buried by most of the news coverage, and no one within the political establishment has raised any objection.

Another key element of Canada's new defence policy is to deepen and expand cooperation with the US. For three-quarters of a century, Canada has been a close military-strategic ally of Washington, but the Liberals, as Trudeau pledged during the last election, intend to further enhance the Canada-US alliance. Increased funding will go towards modernizing the North American Aerospace Command (NORAD), a Cold War-era alliance between Washington and Ottawa which is now pivotal to US war plans against Russia. Specifically, this will entail strengthening Northern Defence, which has responsibility for the Arctic region.

Although the statement outlining the government's new policy, "Strong, Secure, Engaged," does not formally commit Canada to join the US ballistic missile defence system, the pledge to work with Washington to modernize NORAD would make such a move possible in the near future.

International reaction to Canada's new defence policy has been overwhelmingly positive. US Defense Secretary James Mattis said in a statement, "The United States welcomes Canada's marked increase in investment in their military

and their continued commitment to a strong defense relationship with the United States and NATO."

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg praised Ottawa's commitment to NATO. "This new policy affirms Canada's unwavering commitment to NATO and will ensure Canada has the armed forces and key capabilities that the alliance needs," he stated.

Noting ominously that it is impossible to tell what operations NATO will be engaged in five or ten years from now, Stoltenberg added Friday that the alliance now expects "more Canadian presence in Europe." He suggested Canada could be involved in strengthening NATO's maritime presence in the Black Sea and Atlantic, and that its aircraft could participate in air policing operations aimed at Russia.

There is no opposition within the political establishment to the Liberals' aggressive rearmament plans. The media response has been overwhelmingly supportive. The neo-conservative *National Post* enthused that the defence policy could and should have been delivered by a Conservative government.

For the *Globe and Mail*, the mouthpiece of Canada's financial elite, a 73 percent hike in military spending over the next decade is to be welcomed, but needs to be viewed only as a down payment on the weapons that Canada will need to assert its imperialist interests round the globe. "The new defence plan merely allows Canada to stay in the game, as one of NATO's middle powers," it warned.

Conservative defence spokesman James Bezin focused his criticism on his contention that the Liberals could not be trusted to carry out the spending hikes they have announced.

The New Democrats, Canada's social-democratic party, also welcomed the military spending hikes. Defence spokesman Randall Garrison urged that the increase in military spending should be matched by a corresponding rise in the foreign aid budget. In other words, the NDP, which has backed every aggressive war and military intervention that Canada has participated in over the past two decades, from the Balkans to Afghanistan, Haiti and Libya, wants to ensure the necessary "humanitarian" cover is in place to sell future imperialist atrocities to an overwhelmingly skeptical population.



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