

Canada integrating universities into its militarist foreign policy

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10 October 2017

An important aim of the new national defence policy Justin Trudeau's Liberal government announced last June is to integrate the country's universities more fully into the ruling class' aggressive and increasingly militarist foreign policy.

The 113-page defence policy document outlines policy changes to draw universities, individual academics, and "promising" graduate students into playing a more important role in developing high-tech armaments and formulating strategy and propaganda for the aggressive assertion of Canadian imperialism's interests and ambitions around the world.

The defence policy calls for a major rearmament program as well as the "modernization" of NORAD (the North American Aerospace Defence Command), in furtherance of the Canadian Armed Forces' participation in ongoing and future US-led wars around the globe.

The real objective of the policy was made clear by Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland in early June when she said Canada must be ready to use "hard power," i.e. wage war, to defend its interests under conditions of growing "threats" arising from the rise of China, "Russian expansionism," and the collapse in popular support for the US-led world capitalist order.

The document commits the government to a \$62 billion increase in military spending over the next two decades, including a 73 percent hike in the next 10 years, which will boost the annual defence budget from its current level of \$18.9 billion to \$32.7 billion in 2026-27. It includes plans for an additional 5,000 troops, the purchase of 88 fighter jets rather than the 65 proposed by the previous Conservative government, 15 new warships, the procurement of armed drones for surveillance and combat, and additional armoured and supply vehicles for the army. Canada's military will also develop a team of cybersecurity experts to conduct offensive cyber warfare.

The defence policy argues that in all these initiatives the Canadian Armed Forces must collaborate more closely with the "academic community." In other words, the Canadian ruling class wants to transform universities into research laboratories for the military, including in the development of new high-tech armaments, cyberwar software, aerospace technologies, and electronic and photographic surveillance.

The government is also seeking to use universities as think tanks and propaganda departments for Canadian imperialism. It aims to use them more explicitly and systematically to recruit and train academics who can assist in developing Canada's geostrategic-

military policy and promoting an aggressive foreign policy, including by providing "humanitarian" and "social justice" pretexts for imperialist war. In this regard, it is important to note that Canadian academics, politicians and retired officers including Michael Ignatieff, Lloyd and Tom Axworthy, General Romeo Dallaire, and Jennifer Welsh played an important role in fashioning and popularizing the so-called "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine that the US and Canada have repeatedly invoked to justify imperialist "regime-change" wars.

The latest effort by the Canadian bourgeoisie to cloak its predatory ambitions in "progressive" garb is a defence policy pledge, which will no doubt find favour among the well-paid purveyors of identity politics on campuses across the country, to significantly increase the percentage of women and "visible minorities" serving in the armed forces.

An explicit aim of the new defence policy is to draw top-level students into Canadian military-strategic/foreign policy circles. The policy statement calls for developing "collaborative networks of academic and analytic communities," so as to be able to "broaden the diversity of the pool of experts that we can draw upon."

As part of its increased military budget, the CAF will dedicate \$4.5 million per year in a revamped and expanded "defence engagement program." According to the document, this money will be used to develop networks of researchers and experts, a new scholarship program for graduate students and post-Doctoral fellows as well as the expansion of an existing "expert-briefing" program.

The defence policy statement also announced the launching of a new program called Innovation for Defence Excellence and Security (IDEAS), which will see \$1.6 billion invested over the next 20 years to develop "new cooperative partnerships with the private sector, universities, and academics." Fields of research for these new "clusters" will include "surveillance, cyber tools for defence, space, alternative fuels, remotely-piloted systems, data analytics, and counter-improvised explosive device solutions."

The Liberals' defence policy exposes the fraudulent character of Prime Minister Trudeau's anti-war posturing during the 2015 election campaign. In fact, his government has expanded Canada's involvement in Washington's military-strategic offensives in the Middle East as well as against Russia and China.

While the Liberals are intent on expanding the Canadian bourgeoisie's economic and military partnership with the US, the

crisis of American capitalism is also pushing them to strive for a larger role for Canada in world affairs and this is a key aim of the new defence policy. One of the major points Foreign Minister Freeland made in her June speech is that Canada must set its “own clear and sovereign course” and this requires that it expand its capacities to intervene militarily in conflicts around the globe.

Longstanding collaboration between universities and the military

The new defence policy notes that the Canadian Armed Forces has worked with academia for many years and that continuing to do so “will deepen the Government’s understanding of global threats and the complexity of modern conflict.”

It commits the Defence Ministry to working more closely with Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, the ministry in charge of Canada’s economic policy, including financing university science research aimed at fostering a “competitive, knowledge-based economy.”

Mechanisms are already well established for merging universities with the imperialist agenda of the Canadian bourgeoisie. Defence Research and Development Canada (DRDC), an agency of Canada’s Department of National Defence (DND), explains on its website that it “provides the DND, the Canadian Armed Forces and other government departments as well as the public safety and national security communities, the knowledge and technological advantage needed to defend and protect Canada’s interests at home and abroad.”

DRDC also claims that “Universities can generate knowledge, provide access to resources and develop highly-qualified personnel in support of the (military’s) Science & Technology investment in defence and security”; and it stipulates that the required science and technology should be accessed directly from industry and academic institutions “in areas where DRDC cannot or should not be the source of supply and where legal, security or sovereignty issues are not impediments.”

The ties between the military, private companies and academia have expanded rapidly over the past decade. An anti-militarist group called “De-militarize McGill,” active at Montreal’s McGill University, exposed that one of Canada’s principal research universities has increasingly become the site of a wide range of military research projects, for both the Canadian military and the US Air Force. It reported that between 2011 and 2014, McGill received more than \$1 million in defence contracts from Canada’s Department of National Defence.

The student organisation revealed through documents gained from access-to-information requests that some McGill professors led research aimed at developing software for guided missiles and for drones to be used in urban warfare. Other researchers were involved in developing lethal thermobaric explosives and tools for surveilling social media, profiling real-world communities, and influencing and controlling social movements that might destabilize governments.

In 2016, De-militarize McGill showed that McGill professor and director of the Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) Laboratory, Wagdi Habashi, used the CFD lab to develop military software that was then sold to aerospace companies via his own private company, Newmerical Technologies International. The lab is funded in large part by aerospace manufacturers Bombardier, CAE, and Bell Helicopter Textron, all of which have close ties to the Canadian and US militaries.

The CFD software, called FENSAP-ICE, is used to optimize the design of drones and to develop discrete anti-icing systems. As Habashi noted in a 2009 paper, UAV (drone) missions during the NATO war in Afghanistan were marked by “unforeseen mid-level icing encounters.” FENSAP-ICE sought to provide a new form of ice protection. Habashi’s company also sold software to Lockheed Martin in the early 2000s for use in the development of the F-35 fighter jet.

Many more such examples were exposed by De-militarize McGill, and it is not hard to imagine that military-oriented research, often conducted without public scrutiny, is widespread across Canadian universities.

The arms industry is a major player in Canada. A governmental study published in 2014 showed that the Canadian defence industry had annual sales of almost \$10 billion in goods and services, produced by close to 640 firms. The industry boasts that it accounts for some 63,000 jobs spread throughout Canada and contributes \$6.7 billion to GDP. This has increased in recent years and continuing expansion is a specific defence policy goal. According to IHS Jane’s, the defence industry publisher that tracks military spending, Canada ranked sixth overall among all arms-exporting countries in 2016 and became the second biggest arms-seller to the Middle East after the United States.

Since the Second World War, Canada’s armaments industry has been deeply integrated into the American military machine. With the 1956 Defence Industry Productivity Sharing Agreement, the defence sector became the first industry to achieve a form of Canada-US free trade, giving Canadian arms manufacturers duty-free access to the US market.

The growing military involvement of Canada’s academic institutions should be vigorously opposed by students and youth. Universities and colleges should be institutions where science and knowledge are taught and research and experimentation encouraged with the aim of elevating the intellectual and cultural level of the population—not tied to the military and to private enterprises dedicated to enabling an aggressive, militarist foreign policy in pursuit of profits, resources and strategic advantages for Canadian big business.



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