

Canada extends military missions in Ukraine and Mideast, allies with Trump in refugee crackdown

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23 March 2019

In a series of announcements barely reported in the media, Canada's Liberal government has intensified its right-wing, militarist and anti-refugee policies.

The Liberals' budget, delivered Tuesday, confirmed that Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF) military training operations in the Middle East and Ukraine will be extended, for two and three years respectively. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Minister for Border Security, Bill Blair, has revealed he is in talks with Washington to fast-track the expulsion of refugee claimants who flee Trump's brutal anti-immigrant crackdown by crossing into Canada.

Tuesday's budget commits Ottawa to investing some \$1.39 billion over the next two years to maintaining Canada's participation in the US-led war in Iraq and Syria, and in advancing Canadian imperialist interests throughout the oil-rich region. Since Canada joined the latest Iraq-Syria war in 2014 under the previous Conservative government of Stephen Harper, it has played a critical role in facilitating the death and destruction wrought by US-led military operations in both countries. This includes abetting deadly air strikes that claimed the lives of thousands of civilians and the almost total destruction of Mosul, Iraq's third largest city, and Raqqa in Syria.

Conscious of the widespread opposition to the Mideast war, the Trudeau government in February 2016 recalibrated the mission, ordering the withdrawal of fighter jets and the deployment of additional Special Forces troops and command personnel. Deployed to northern Iraq in what was ostensibly a "training" mission, the Special Forces troops provided frontline advice and support to Kurdish *peshmerga* forces in operations close to Mosul during the ruinous onslaught on that city.

The Liberals subsequently expanded Canada's military involvement in Iraq as part of a stepped up Canadian role in NATO that has seen the CAF take the lead role in a new "forward deployed" NATO battalion in Latvia, on Russia's border. At NATO's 2018 annual summit, Canada agreed to take command of a new NATO mission to train Iraqi troops fighting for the central government in Baghdad for one year. This has now been extended until the end of March 2021.

The Ukraine mission, which is being promoted by the government and media as the defence of "democracy" against "Russian aggression," is to be extended for a further three years, at

a cost of an additional \$105 million.

Canadian troops were first deployed to Ukraine, with the aim of training Ukrainian Army and National Guard forces to wage war in the east against pro-Russian separatists, by the previous Tory government following the 2014 Western-orchestrated, fascist-led coup in Kiev and Russia's subsequent annexation of Crimea.

Like the Middle East deployment, Trudeau's Liberals picked up seamlessly from where Harper's Conservatives left off, extending the Ukrainian training mission when it came up for renewal in 2016 and providing full-throated support for NATO's belligerent moves against Russia.

In highly-provocative comments made during a 2016 visit to Ukraine, Trudeau said the 200 CAF personnel deployed there are preparing its soldiers to "liberate" Ukrainian "territory"—a clear reference to Russian-controlled Crimea and other predominantly Russian-speaking areas in eastern Ukraine that have revolted against Kiev's ultra-nationalist government.

Behind all of the rhetoric about a "feminist" and "humanitarian" foreign policy, the Liberals' actions in the Middle East and Eastern Europe demonstrate their role as a bludgeon for advancing the Canadian ruling elite's global predatory interests.

They also underscore Trudeau's commitment to deepening Canadian imperialism's strategic partnership with Washington and Wall Street, even as they pursue incendiary military-strategic offensives in the Middle East, against Russia and China, and threaten Venezuela with invasion.

In their 2017 national defence policy "Strong, Secure, Engaged," the Liberals committed to hike military spending by more than 70 percent by 2026 to almost \$33 billion per year. In preparation for Canada's participation in future major wars, the defence policy calls for the purchase of new warplanes and battleships, armed drones and armored vehicles, and an increase in military personnel.

In explaining the policy's aims, Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland said Canada must do more to supplement a weakened US in maintaining the North American-led "world order," and that this will require "hard power" and a readiness to fight wars—something she emphasized Canada had done repeatedly in the 20th century. In her June 2017 speech, Freeland denounced Russia as a strategic rival and identified China as a "global threat."

That the corporate-controlled media has said little to nothing

about the extension of the Mideast and Ukraine military missions and that the ostensible “left” New Democratic Party has failed to issue a word of criticism only underscore that Canadian imperialism’s expanding global military footprint enjoys universal support within the political establishment.

What the media has been full of in recent days are propaganda pieces deploring a reputed Liberal government spending spree ahead of this fall’s federal election. The measures cited as “proof” for such claims, including a pitiful \$4.5 billion over five years to improve living conditions for Canada’s indigenous peoples and a \$1.8 billion tax break for low-income seniors who remain in the workforce, are not even a drop in the bucket when set against the fiscal austerity enforced by Liberal, Conservative, NDP and Parti Québécois federal and provincial governments for decades.

Working with Trump to fast-track the expulsion of refugees

The true measure of the Trudeau government’s “progressive” posturing is given by its intimate cooperation with the Trump administration on domestic as well as foreign policy issues.

Blair’s announcement during a *Globe and Mail* interview that he is seeking to close a loophole in the Canada-US Safe Third Country Agreement is highly significant in this regard.

The agreement allows Canada to immediately return refugee claimants arriving at an official entry point from the United States on the grounds that the US is a “safe country,” whose “democratic” institutions will ensure they are afforded all the protections of international law. However, a loophole in the agreement means that refugees crossing outside official entry points along the lengthy Canada-US land border can apply for asylum.

Under conditions of Trump’s vicious crackdown on refugees and immigrants—which has included the separation of families, abuse of children, and the confining of refugees in concentration camp-like conditions—tens of thousands have taken advantage of this loophole during the past two years, crossed into Canada, and applied for asylum. Notwithstanding the official media propaganda, they have been met with cold hostility from the authorities, with many left to languish in poor housing and survive on food-bank handouts.

Up until now, the Trudeau government has insisted that there is no need to revise the Safe Third Country Agreement, since, at its orders, Canada Border Services is deporting the vast majority of those seeking asylum back to their impoverished and in many cases war-torn countries.

Now the Liberals are seeking to make a deal with Trump that will condemn thousands of desperate men, women, and children to detention, mistreatment and possibly worse at the hands of Trump’s thuggish Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection personnel, before ultimately being deported.

Blair, who oversaw the brutal repression meted out to thousands of anti-G20 protesters in Toronto in 2010, tried to justify this by

denouncing those who “have crossed into Canada irregularly” for undermining “the fairness and effectiveness of Canada’s asylum system.” In reality, the Liberals are bowing to anti-immigrant chauvinism whipped up by the most reactionary sections of the establishment, including Ontario Premier Doug Ford.

The Liberals’ escalation of their militarist and xenophobic policies comes amid a sharp shift to the right within the Canadian bourgeoisie. Over the past year, it has brought right-wing populist governments to power in Ontario and Quebec, the country’s two most populous provinces. This week there were fresh revelations about the ties of the United Conservative Party, which to the delight of the corporate elite appears poised to win Alberta’s April election, to far-right and outright fascist forces. One of the party’s star candidates, Caylan Ford, was forced to resign after a report revealed she made favorable Facebook comments about fascist protesters in Charlottesville in August 2017, where a neo-Nazi killed a counter-protester by striking her with his car.

Within this context, a significant and growing faction of the bourgeoisie is voicing concerns that the Trudeau government is not moving far enough and fast enough in implementing its class war agenda. This faction fears Trudeau is prevaricating in carrying through the ruthless attacks on the working class needed to pay for Canada’s rearmament and foreign aggression and enhance the “competitive position” of Canadian capital. It is considering the possibility of forcing Trudeau to resign in favour of a “war-hawk” like Freeland or bringing to power the Conservatives after the upcoming election.

In recent weeks this faction has stepped up its attacks on Trudeau through the SNC-Lavalin scandal, which has revealed the extent to which the Liberal government acted at the beck-and-call of one of Canada’s largest corporate players, rewriting and bending the law to shield it from criminal prosecution.

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