

Trudeau and Biden to strengthen Canada-US military alliance and trade-war bloc

Roger Jordan
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On Friday, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau became the first foreign leader to speak with US President Joe Biden. The readouts of the call released by both sides, together with a flurry of commentary in the bourgeois press prior to and after Biden's inauguration, underscore that Ottawa and Washington plan to expand their global military-strategic partnership so as to more aggressively challenge their great-power rivals, above all Russia and China.

The White House noted that the call focused on "the strategic importance of the U.S.-Canada relationship and reinvigorating our bilateral cooperation." Trudeau's office stressed America and Canada's "shared values and interests on the global stage," and announced a plan for the two leaders to meet again in a month's time to expand "the deep and enduring friendship between Canada and the United States."

These statements are not merely standard diplomatic niceties. On the contrary, the Canadian ruling elite wants to take advantage of the change in administration in Washington to repackage its collaboration with the United States in a more "progressive" wrapping.

Behind this, North America's twin imperialist powers are preparing a dramatic intensification of their economic and military collaboration, an expansion of trade war measures, and an acceleration of preparations for military conflict with their great power rivals.

The main form these policies will take is a concerted push, particularly on the part of the Canadian ruling elite, for a "North America First" agenda. The fact that numerous senior advisers and policy experts have utilized this formulation in interviews and comments in recent weeks confirms how, in its fundamentals, the collaboration between the Biden administration and Trudeau government will rest on the same reactionary nationalist and protectionist basis as Trump's "America First" program.

The "North America First" slogan is aimed above all at Russia and China, who are seen as direct competitors and strategic threats by Ottawa and Washington. Military strategists and defence experts have long been discussing the

need to modernize the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD), a bilateral Cold War-era mechanism uniting Canadian and US military forces. A key element in NORAD modernization is Canada's integration into Washington's ballistic missile defence shield and the deployment of new nuclear-capable missiles, steps whose logic is to place both countries on a course toward waging a "winnable" nuclear war with Beijing or Moscow.

These plans were discussed by Trudeau and Biden. "The Prime Minister and President agreed to expand cooperation on continental defence and in the Arctic, including the need to modernize NORAD, and discussed their Foreign Affairs and National Defence ministers and secretaries of State and Defense meeting at the earliest opportunity," stated the Trudeau government's release on the bilateral call.

This is a continuation of the strategy the Canadian ruling class pursued during Trump's presidency. After Trump's election victory in 2016, the *Globe and Mail*, Canada's "newspaper of record," declared emphatically that Canada needed to be behind "Trump's walls." Throughout Trump's presidency, Trudeau and his Liberal government avoided making any criticism of the fascist-minded occupant of the White House, even when his preparations for a coup to establish an authoritarian regime became undeniably clear.

While the Canadian bourgeoisie connived with and accommodated to Trump's authoritarian actions, his "America First" nationalism and unpredictability created problems for Ottawa. Economically, his threat to tear up NAFTA and his imposition of tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum cut across corporate Canada's intimate trading relationship with the US, which is the destination for around three-quarters of all Canadian exports. Ideologically, Trump's open embrace of right-wing extremists and fascists made it difficult for Trudeau and his Liberals, who place great store in their "progressive" credentials for propaganda purposes, to sell the Canada-US alliance to an overwhelmingly skeptical public.

With Biden's entry into the White House and the Democrats' control of Congress, Canada's political

establishment hopes that these challenges can be overcome. Like the Democratic Party establishment, they intend to use “democratic” rhetoric and identity politics to sugar-coat an aggressive pro-war foreign policy. As the Trudeau government noted in its readout of the call with Biden, both leaders have a “shared commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion.”

This imperialist agenda enjoys all-party support within Canada’s parliament. This was illustrated in November when the trade union-backed New Democratic Party tabled a parliamentary motion, which won support from all parties, congratulating Biden on his electoral victory and looking forward to close cooperation with the new administration.

Tensions remain, however, including over the incoming president’s plans to include “Buy American” provisions in his administration’s infrastructure building/economic stimulus initiative. As part of his effort to cultivate an image as a fighter against climate change, Biden on his first day in office canceled federal authorization for the Keystone XL oil pipeline, effectively killing the project, which was to transport Canadian bitumen oil from Alberta’s tar sands to the US Gulf Coast for export worldwide. Although Trudeau expressed his “disappointment” at this decision when he spoke to Biden, a minority section of Canada’s ruling elite is demanding a far more forceful response. Alberta Premier Jason Kenney, whose government invested well over a billion dollars in the failed project, has called for Ottawa to impose retaliatory tariffs if Biden doesn’t reverse his decision to scuttle Keystone XL.

Notwithstanding the substantial economic gains the Keystone pipeline would have brought to Canada’s oil sector, the majority of the ruling elite believes it has no choice but to quietly accept Biden’s decision. As Trudeau himself put it prior to his call with Biden, “We have so much alignment—not just me and President Biden, but Canadians,” i.e., Canada’s ruling elite, “and President Biden.”

One of the areas where Canada desires to strengthen its “alignment” with the Biden administration is on Washington’s anti-China policy. The political establishment hopes that Biden will prove more effective in countering China’s rise than Trump. Whereas the former president’s resort to brash threats and provocations created political problems for Ottawa and proved largely ineffective in combatting Beijing’s economic and geopolitical rise, Biden’s intention to establish a coalition of “democratic” nations to diplomatically, economically, and militarily intensify pressure on Beijing is being touted as a more expeditious approach. The outgoing Chief of Defence Staff, General Jonathan Vance, summed this up most clearly with his appeal earlier this month for Canada to develop a “grand strategy” with its traditional Western allies to confront

China and Russia, a task which he added had been difficult to accomplish under Trump.

Trudeau and Biden discussed China during their call, specifically the related cases of the two Canadian citizens, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, currently detained in China, and Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou. Meng, the chief financial officer of the Chinese tech giant, has been under house arrest in Vancouver for more than two years. She was detained by Canadian authorities on bogus charges of violating US sanctions on Iran, at Washington’s behest as part of its provocative efforts to bully Beijing into making economic and geostrategic concessions.

Behind the “democratic” phrase-mongering for public consumption, Canadian and US policy experts have made clear that confronting China will require a further acceleration of the drive to war, which has already seen the Trudeau government announce a more than 70 percent 10-year hike in military spending.

David MacNaughton, who served as Canada’s ambassador to Washington during much of the Trump presidency, told the *Globe* last week that Ottawa should press its case for corporate Canada’s guaranteed access to the US market under a “North America First” policy, by pledging to increase spending on NATO and NORAD, and by taking an even tougher stance towards China. “The Americans,” said MacNaughton, “are going to expect us to play a larger role in defence and security than we have in the past. We should expect that, and they are going to press on China ... and we can’t say, ‘Sorry we will talk to you about that later’.”

An opinion piece co-authored by Kevin Lynch, formerly the country’s top civil servant, entitled “What Canada can do for Biden,” urged Ottawa to collaborate with Biden to “shorten” US supply chains, i.e., reduce its economic dependence on China, and pursue “North America First” trade, climate change, and energy policies. Underlining that this protectionist economic agenda is inseparably bound up with geostrategic bullying and military force, the article continued, “Canada could help change the American dialogue by making early defence spending commitments including specific increases in support of NORAD, Arctic sovereignty and peacekeeping.”



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