

Biden and Trudeau revamp Canada-US alliance for trade war and military conflict

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US President Joe Biden held his first bilateral head-of-government meeting as president with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau via video conference last week. The Feb. 23 meeting adopted a comprehensive plan to expand and strengthen the US-Canada economic and military-strategic partnership to pursue trade war against their common great-power rivals and modernize military infrastructure in preparation for war.

Underscoring that the Canada-US alliance is a key element in advancing both imperialist powers' predatory global ambitions, the Trudeau-Biden summit was given the character of a joint cabinet meeting. It was attended by leading personnel from both governments, including US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, their Canadian counterparts, respectively, Mark Garneau, Harjit Sajjan and Chrystia Freeland, and US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and Trudeau's chief of staff, Katie Telford.

The Roadmap for a Renewed US-Canada Partnership, issued by Biden and Trudeau at the summit's conclusion, outlines plans to expand cooperation across the board with the aim of reasserting North American imperialist world dominance. The "blueprint" for a "whole-of-government" partnership includes plans to modernize NORAD (the North American Aerospace Defense Command), secure "strategic" production chains and minerals critical for military and high-tech industries, and make North America the world leader in "clean" energy industries.

The mainstream media largely treated the meeting as a pro forma event, which recycled traditional boilerplate rhetoric about the strength of Canadian-American friendship and was held to demonstrate the return to bilateral "normalcy."

To be sure, Biden did want to draw a sharp contrast with Trump, who repeatedly roiled Canada-US relations, including by threatening to scrap NAFTA. But the Roadmap does not represent a return to "business as usual" in US foreign policy, which, as a preliminary matter, would be bad enough, as millions of people in the war-torn countries of Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Libya can attest.

Rather, it represents an intensification and revamping of the eight-decade-old military-strategic partnership between Washington and Ottawa under conditions of unprecedented global capitalist crisis. The coronavirus pandemic, acting as a trigger event, has exacerbated the rivalries between the major powers, increased social inequality, and led to a radicalization of the working class that places mass class battles on the order of the day. To defend the wealth and advance the global interests of the capitalist oligarchies that rule the US and Canada, Ottawa and Washington are forging a "renewed partnership" to enhance North American "competitiveness," i.e., mount savage attacks on the working class at home, and pursue "strategic competition" against their common great-power rivals.

Preparations for great power conflict

The two leaders agreed to modernize the North American Aerospace Defence Command to strengthen continental defence capabilities. This initiative, the *Wall Street Journal* estimates, will cost US \$40 billion. Canada's proposed portion of this massive sum, \$6 billion, is equivalent to a third of Ottawa's \$19 billion (CAN \$23.4 billion) annual defence budget.

As part of the Roadmap, Trudeau and his Liberal government also reaffirmed their pledge to rapidly increase annual defence spending to 2 percent of gross domestic product, an increase of more than one third from its current level. This was coupled with a bilateral commitment to strengthen NATO, which for more than seven decades has been pivotal to projecting US imperialist power in Europe and the Middle East.

Established during the Cold War, NORAD is seen by military planners in Washington and Ottawa as critical to the great-power confrontations of the future, especially with Russia and China. Its purpose is discussed in ever more openly aggressive and provocative terms. Whereas in the past its existence was justified with claims about the need to stop incoming missiles from the Soviet Union or Russia, it is now bluntly stated that instead of taking out the "arrows," Canada and the US must strike the "archer," i.e., carry out first-strike attacks on launch sites in Russia and China.

The mad plan to modernize NORAD for potential war with nuclear-armed Russia and China will invariably involve renewed pressure for Canada to join the US ballistic missile defence shield. Canada's military establishment has long favored Canada joining the missile shield, but governments have dared not proceed because of widespread public opposition to participating in a program which, its name notwithstanding, is aimed at making a catastrophic nuclear war "winnable."

As part of their Roadmap, Washington and Ottawa also agreed to establish an "expanded Canada-US Arctic dialogue" to discuss "continental security, economic and social development, and Arctic governance." The Arctic is becoming a major arena for geopolitical confrontation due to climate change, which is opening up the region's shipping lanes to great power rivalries and inciting a race to control its increasingly accessible energy and mineral resources.

In a similar vein, the Roadmap pledged to "increase cooperation to strengthen cybersecurity, and to confront foreign interference and disinformation." As part of their efforts to protect critical infrastructure in North America, the two countries will implement a "Framework for Collaboration on cybersecurity in the energy sector."

The Canadian and US ruling elites intend to underpin these plans for war with closer economic cooperation, including by further developing the ever more explicit protectionist trade bloc consolidated under the Trump administration. The Roadmap heaps praise on the protectionist US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, the replacement to NAFTA negotiated by

Trump and Trudeau with the support of the trade unions.

The Roadmap takes explicit aim at China. It calls on both countries to “more closely align our approaches to China, including to address the challenges it presents to our collective interest and to the international rules-based order,” i.e., US global dominance. The document denounces the Stalinist regime in Beijing, which defends the interests of China’s capitalist oligarchy, for “its coercive and unfair economic practices, national security challenges, and human rights abuses.” This language is all but identical to the lurid denunciations of China made by the NDP and Canada’s other establishment “left” parties in recent months, including the unfounded allegation that Beijing is guilty of “genocide” against the Uyghur Muslim minority.

The document is no less strident in assailing Russia. It condemns Moscow’s “egregious mistreatment of Aleksey Navalny,” a far-right pro-imperialist stooge. It also denounces Russia’s “gross violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity,” a reference to the Kremlin’s response to the 2014 fascist-spearheaded coup in Kiev, which the US and Canada helped orchestrate. The Roadmap also notes that Biden and Trudeau discussed the situation in the Middle East and Venezuela, two areas where Canadian imperialism has supported its US ally in mounting regime-change operations.

Dominating the economy of the future

Despite Biden’s difference in style from Trump, he is pursuing a like protectionist economic agenda and with the same aim: to retain American global economic and geostrategic primacy against its rivals through trade war, diplomatic intrigue, and military conflict. While Trump framed this policy with far-right “America First” rhetoric and celebrated unilateral US action, Biden has emphasized his support for “multilateral” institutions and US-led “multilateral” initiatives against China and Russia.

This aggressive agenda is masked with phony blather about “democracy,” “human rights,” and “inclusiveness.” As part of the Roadmap, Canada announced its support for Biden’s convening of a “Summit for Democracy”—a cynically-titled initiative that will serve as a thinly-veiled cover for provocations and threats against China and Russia.

With a view to confronting Russia and China, but also their ostensible European and Japanese imperialist allies, the Roadmap calls for increased Canada-US collaboration to ensure North American dominance in key emerging technologies, including those essential for transitioning to non-carbon-based energy.

It announces that Canada and the US will “launch a strategy to strengthen Canada-US supply chain security.” This will include building “the necessary supply chains to make Canada and the United States global leaders in all aspects of battery development and production.” The document continues, “To that end, the leaders agreed to strengthen the Canada-U.S. Critical Minerals Action Plan to target a net-zero industrial transformation, batteries for zero-emissions vehicles, and renewable energy storage.”

The Critical Minerals Action Plan was developed in 2019 by the Trump administration and Trudeau government, with the aims of reducing the dependence of North America’s twin imperialist powers on China for 17 rare earths and minerals. These materials are crucial to the manufacture of missile systems, computer screens, electric vehicles, lasers, and other hi-tech devices, i.e., the key elements of the equipment required to wage military conflict and dominate the world economy in the decades to come.

These bilateral initiatives take place in parallel with Biden’s readying of an executive order to strengthen US supply chains. He is expected to order 100-day reviews of four strategically important economic areas:

“computer chips, high-capacity batteries, pharmaceuticals and their active ingredients, and critical minerals and strategic materials, like rare earths.”

Biden and Trudeau also committed to initiating a “joint ministerial” dialogue on climate change with the aim of reaching net zero emissions by 2050. A major goal of this “dialogue” will be to press other “democratic” countries, under the guise of bogus pledges to fight climate change, to line up against China and Russia, which have poor emissions records, and accept Washington’s hegemony in emerging technologies and energy markets. The climate change initiative will “hold polluters accountable,” the Roadmap asserts, including by working to prevent “unfair trade by countries failing to take strong climate action.” That is, it will impose tariffs and other penalties on Russia and China, and attempt, as the Trump administration did, to banish Huawei and other leading Chinese-based tech firms from strategically significant markets.

The hollow references to “unfair trade,” coming from a country whose violation of international law is second to none, could just as easily be turned against erstwhile allies to enforce US imperialist demands. It is worth noting in this regard the bipartisan US opposition to the German-Russian Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, which Democrats and Republicans alike have denounced, including for its environmental risks.

In the run-up to the Trudeau-Biden summit, there was much media discussion about Canada pressing for an exemption from the “Buy America” provisions of Biden’s economic-stimulus infrastructure-building program. However, the White House would only promise at this point to take Ottawa’s concerns into account.

The refrain from Canada’s corporate and political elite, including the trade union bureaucracy, is that Ottawa must press for Washington to eschew “America First” protectionism in favour of a “North America First” agenda. They view expanding the Canada-US military-security alliance and new or enhanced partnerships on energy, strategic supply-chains and mineral “security” as vital. Vital to ensuring privileged access for corporate Canada to the US market and to upholding American capitalist hegemony, which is critical to the assertion of Canadian imperialism’s own predatory global interests.



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