Canada leads calls for Ukraine's NATO membership, joins US in recklessly downplaying nuclear war threat

Matthew Richter
6 October 2022

Canada has responded to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's filing last week of a formal application for his country's admission to NATO by urging Kiev's prompt incorporation into the aggressive US-led military alliance. Ottawa has been joined in this by a cabal of the most belligerent Eastern European states, including Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

Speaking in Washington alongside US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on September 30, just hours after the Ukraine application was announced, Canadian Foreign Minster Mélanie Joly declared, "We believe that Ukraine should be part of NATO. It has been our position for now more than a decade, and we believe in the 'Open Door' policy."

Blinken was somewhat more circumspect. He emphasized that there is an admission "process" for would-be NATO states to follow, while adding "NATO's door will remain open, including for Ukraine."

The reality is Ukraine is already functioning as an arm of NATO, above all, Washington. The US and its NATO allies, Canada included, have poured tens of billions of dollars in advanced weaponry into Ukraine since the outbreak of the war last February; and the Pentagon, as has been publicly admitted, is providing Ukrainian forces with strategic and tactical support, including the intelligence and weapons to target Russian generals.

That said, Joly's remarks underscore the utter recklessness of Canadian imperialism and its NATO allies. Even as they are forced to concede there is a growing danger the Ukraine war will escalate into a nuclear conflict, they are ratcheting up pressure on Russia and threatening a wider war.

Ukraine's integration into NATO would immediately transform the war into a direct military conflict between the Western imperialist powers and Russia. Not only would Ukraine invariably invoke NATO's Article 5 under which all member states are obliged to defend any NATO member under attack. Biden has repeatedly vowed that the US will defend "every inch" of NATO territory.

Joly's blithe indifference to the danger that an all-out NATO-Russia conflict would pose for the peoples of Europe, North America and the world is very much in keeping with the NATO powers' insistence that the threat of the war turning nuclear must not be allowed to interfere with their plans to inflict a decisive defeat on Russia.

The reactionary nationalist Putin regime has responded to Russia's mounting military debacle in Ukraine by making repeated threats that, if needed, it will use nuclear weapons to counter what it considers an existential threat. To this, government and military officials in Washington, Berlin, London, Paris and Ottawa have uniformly responded by vowing that the war with Russia must be intensified.

Underscoring that discussions are well advanced among the imperialist powers on how they would respond if the Putin regime deployed nuclear weapons, Joly responded to a CBC interviewer's question on what Canada would do by saying, "This is a decision we will take amongst the G-7." She added ominously that Canada is preparing for all eventualities.

In declaring her support for Ukraine's admission into NATO, Joly praised the rapid steps taken to make Sweden and Finland full NATO members after the two Scandinavian countries filed formal applications in May. She noted that they are both Arctic powers and sit on the Arctic Council. The Canadian government clearly sees an opportunity to exploit NATO's expansion to more aggressively pursue its territorial and geostrategic interests in the Arctic, yet another critical theater in the developing great power conflict. The opening up of the Far North sea lanes due to climate change and the imminent prospect of the disappearance of sea ice is creating new opportunities for the major powers to exploit new trade routes and the Arctic's large deposits of oil, gas and rare earth elements. Canada's primary rival in the region is Russia.

Joly's unvarnished support for Ukraine's accession to NATO reveals Canadian imperialism's true colours. From the time of the 1956 Suez Crisis up until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Canada's ruling elite for self-serving, pragmatic reasons cast itself as a "peacekeeping" nation. This position, which was made possible by the postwar restabilization of capitalism, became untenable after the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, which opened up a new period of unrestrained imperialist military violence.

US imperialism embarked on three decades of uninterrupted wars in the Middle East and Central Asia as it desperately sought to offset its economic decline through military force. Canada joined these bloody interventions as one of Washington's closest allies, while staunchly supporting the expansion of NATO to Russia's borders. Ottawa played an important role in triggering

the current conflict with Russia, as shown by the Canadian military's extensive involvement in restructuring the Ukrainian army and integrating fascist paramilitaries into its regular fighting force between 2014 and 2022.

The aggressive role that Canada is playing in Ukraine was driven home in a caucus meeting of the governing Liberals last week. Echoing the war hysteria that has gripped the ruling elites in every imperialist country, Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland crowed, "[W]hat we must do is double down on our support for Ukraine." Freeland, as the *World Socialist Web Site* has documented elsewhere, embodies the decades-long alliance between the Canadian state and the Ukrainian far right.

The Trudeau government responded to Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement last week of the annexation of territories in eastern and southern Ukraine by repeating its vow that Canada will assist Ukraine in "liberating" all its territories, including Crimea, home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet. It also imposed another round of sanctions, including on 43 "oligarchs" and 35 Russian-backed officials in the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts. This brings the number of Russian affiliated individuals and entities targeted by Canadian sanctions to over 1,400 since the beginning of the war.

On the military front, Canada continues to ship vast amounts of equipment to Ukraine. In a recent interview with the CBC, Defence Minister Anita Anand revealed that Canada has shipped more than 4 million pounds of cargo to Ukraine since the spring. Much of the equipment has been funneled through a Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) hub in Prestwick, Scotland, an airport that was once a transfer point for victims of CIA "extraordinary rendition." According to Anand, at least three Canadian CC-130 Hercules transport aircraft are running weapons and supplies to Ukraine.

Sources told the CBC that Ukraine has written to the Canadian government with requests for significantly more military aid. Canada's military contribution alone has surpassed $626 million since January, including millions of rounds of ammunition, anti-tank weapons like the Carl Gustav, 39 General Dynamics Super Bison light armoured vehicles, four M777 howitzers with 10 replacement barrels and tens of thousands of rounds of 155mm ammunition. The government has been tight-lipped about much of the aid. In one example of this, a defence source told the CBC earlier this year that GPS precision-guided M982 Excalibur shells have been quietly provided to Ukraine.

In addition to materiel support, Canada has secretively dispatched Special Forces to coordinate the fighting on the ground in Ukraine, a fact only revealed months later in a July *New York Times* article. Operation UNIFIER, the operation to train Ukrainian military personnel, recommenced on August 25 in Britain. Over 33,000 have been trained by the mission since September 2019, with only a brief pause during the initial stages of the war. Late last year, it was revealed that Canadian forces had trained members of the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion and deliberately sought to cover it up.

The political establishment, from the "left" New Democrats and pro-Quebec independence Bloc Québécois to the Conservatives, all support continuing to pour gasoline on the fire by increasing weapons deliveries still further.

Bob Rae, the erstwhile NDP premier of Ontario, interim leader of the federal Liberals (2011-13) and current Canadian Ambassador to the UN, urged the Trudeau government to give Ukraine anything it asks for. Commenting on the Ukrainian government's letter asking for more weapons, Rae said in an interview with CBC radio, "We have to keep on pushing because the test of our success is ... are we meeting the needs that will allow Ukraine to achieve the objectives which it has, and frankly which we share?"

With the full support of its trade union allies, the New Democratic Party (NDP) responded to the outbreak of the US-NATO proxy war over Ukraine by negotiating a "confidence-and-supply" agreement with the Trudeau Liberals in March to guarantee "stability"—that is, the suppression of the class struggle on behalf of Canadian imperialism. Under the agreement, the NDP has pledged to provide the minority Liberal government a parliamentary majority through June 2025. The Liberals and NDP have used this majority to vastly expand the financial resources flowing to the military. The 2022 budget provided an additional $8 billion in defence spending on top of the huge hikes already introduced as part of the Liberals' 2017 defence policy review.

In addition, the Trudeau government has announced plans to spend $40 billion over the next two decades on upgrading the North American Aerospace Defence (NORAD) bilateral command with the United States, which is seen as critical for waging war with Russia and China. The modernization plans will facilitate Canada's participation in the US ballistic missile defence shield, which in spite of its name is aimed at making a nuclear war waged by US imperialism "winnable."

The corporate-controlled media is wholeheartedly supporting the escalation of the war with Russia by producing an uninterrupted stream of warmongering, anti-Russian bile. Andrew Coyne, a leading *Globe and Mail* columnist, blurted out the imperialists' determination to bring about "regime change" in Russia as part of their push to dismember the country and seize control of its natural resources. Entitled "There can be no end to this war that leaves Putin in power," Coyne's column revived the false Manichean Cold War narrative of a world divided between the "rational" and "democratic" West and the vainglorious, deceitful Russians. "The West's war aims at the start," wrote Coyne, "were limited to raising the cost of Russian aggression, or perhaps containing its advance. Our aim must now be, not just victory in Ukraine, but regime change in Russia."

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact