

Trudeau government orchestrates massive growth in partnerships between Canadian military and universities

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The WSWS encourages its readers in the Toronto area to attend the IYSSE sponsored meeting “The War in Ukraine and How to Stop It,” at the Lillian H. Smith Branch—Toronto Public Library on June 4 at 2:30 p.m. Click here for more information.

The Justin Trudeau-led Liberal government is pursuing a predatory imperialist foreign policy, expressed most clearly in Canada’s provocative participation in the US-NATO war on Russia and fulsome support for Washington’s advanced preparations for war with China. A critical aspect of the rapid escalation of Canadian militarism over recent years has been the co-opting of major universities by the military and defence sector, turning them into research agencies for weapons of death and destruction, and the global geostrategic and economic interests of Canadian imperialism.

In a process that has been escalating for years, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has extended its tentacles into higher education. In 2017, as part of an announcement of the Trudeau government’s bellicose new national defence policy, the government stated its desire to redouble its efforts to increase cooperation between the military and universities. As part of the initiative, \$4.5 million per year was dedicated to the expanded “defence engagement program” with scholars and \$1.6 billion over 20 years for the Innovation for Defence Excellence and Security (IDEAS) initiative, for developing “new cooperative partnerships with the private sector, universities, and academics.”

The funding from the Department of National Defence (DND) and related programs is designed to provide Canadian imperialism with the intellectual, technological, and scientific know-how it requires to wage war around the world. The government is funding research into high-tech technologies intended to transfer competitive advantages to Canadian big business as trade wars mount, especially in economic areas that bring significant military applications.

Relationships developed between the military and Canadian universities include:

- The Centre for Military, Security and Strategic Studies and the School of Public Policy, both at the University of Calgary, received “substantial” funding in 2021 from the DND according to the university. Scholars from both institutes are leading the Canadian Network on Information and Security (CANIS) project. CANIS is in turn funded through the MINDS (Mobilizing Insights in Defence and Security) program, designed to increase and diversify research on defence and security issues in Canada.

- Academics from the University of Toronto, the University of British Columbia, the University of Quebec and McGill University are collaborating with the DND via \$1.5 million pledged in 2022 to “inform the development of secure edge computing applications” in light of the growth of 5G mobile technology and the “Internet of Things.”

- The University of Ottawa is engaged in research on artificial intelligence and cybersecurity to “help enhance Canada’s national security.” The projects are funded by the DND through the IDEAS program and is in partnership with the corporation Blackberry, a mobile phone producer. Another research project at the University of Ottawa partners with the DND and the telecom giant TELUS to design “artificial intelligence (AI)-backed autonomous decision-making models to provide DND with dynamic resource management.”

- In January 2023, the University of Waterloo announced, in collaboration with École de technologie supérieure in Montréal, the University of Regina and several telecommunications companies, the development of 5G mobile networks with \$1.5 million in funding from the DND. The aim of the program is to develop methods for detecting and repelling cyber-attacks. While it’s claimed to be defensive, the insights produced can and will be leveraged in support of offensive cyber warfare.

- The University of Guelph signed an agreement with

Defence Research and Development Canada, an agency of the DND, to conduct social science research in support of the military, aiming to, among other things, develop “trust in diverse organizational teams and in cross-cultural settings.”

These associations highlight the symbiotic relationships being developed between the state, big business and academia which are being increasingly mobilized as the ruling class prepares for war with Russia and China. Advances in the high-tech sector have very potent military uses, such as those related to drone warfare, cyber warfare and surveillance. Militaries around the world have noted their effect in conflicts in Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh, and now Ukraine. The government’s decision to ban Chinese tech giant Huawei from hosting 5G infrastructure in Canada has created a gap that is now being filled in part by domestic firms.

The increasing association with the military has been met with little resistance from academics themselves. Even in the recent past, faculty have raised objections to the close ties with the CAF. During the Harper years, as part of the government’s efforts to cultivate a jingoistic “warrior nation” image, the University of Regina participated in “Project Hero,” which provided free tuition and additional funding for dependents of CAF members killed on deployment. Fifteen professors at the university signed an open letter that denounced the program as a “glorification of Canadian imperialism in Afghanistan and elsewhere.”

The government’s determined push to strengthen the military’s presence on university campuses has been hampered by a series of scandals, including rampant cases of sexual assault in the military and the sharp rise in far-right extremism within the ranks.

The influential role of far-right forces in the military came to public attention with the 2020 attempted assassination of Trudeau by an army reservist, as well as the revelation that the fascistic “Freedom Convoy” had widespread support within the military.

The ruling class seeks to explain this phenomenon as the product of the infiltration of the armed forces by a handful of isolated white supremacists, not the systematic cultivation through more than 20 years of war and the relentless shift of politics to the right of these elements by the ruling class itself. The DND has enlisted a University of Alberta academic to assess the problem along those lines and no doubt bury the fundamental social factors at play.

The increasing collaboration of universities with the military comes as the latter struggles with low recruitment. Apparently 10,000 troops short of its needs, the military has lifted the ban on permanent residents serving in the CAF. The recruitment drive is meant to complement the massive arms build-up underway, with defence minister Anita Anand

citing the war in Ukraine as responsible for creating new demands on the army.

In the past few years, high-ranking officers have expressed concerns that with recruitment at a low, domestic obligations would hinder their ability to wage war abroad. While disaster relief was routinely referenced, the ruling class no doubt is concerned about whether the military will be able to simultaneously fight its imperialist wars abroad while crushing the opposition that they are certain to generate in the working class at home.

Since the coming to power of the Trudeau government in 2015, the ruling class has attempted to drape its predatory policies in identity politics rhetoric, touting its so-called “feminist foreign policy.” As the *World Socialist Web Site* has previously noted, “An important element in the ruling class’s efforts to rally public support for Canadian imperialist rearmament and aggression is to promote the military as a ‘progressive,’ ethnically and gender ‘diverse’ institution, incarnating both the ‘diversity’ and ‘unity’ of the nation.”

Under these conditions, the ruling class and its lackeys in academia cannot accept a socialist challenge to these lies. The attempt to censor the anti-war meeting hosted at the University of Waterloo by the IYSSE in March must be seen in this light. The effort to camouflage NATO’s role in instigating the war in Ukraine by placing all of the blame for the conflict at Vladimir Putin’s feet has not produced the support among the public that the government hoped it would and workers are now increasingly connecting their domestic struggles in defence of their living standards with the vast sums of resources being squandered on yet another imperialist bloodbath in Europe.



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