

Canadian imperialism outlines its plans for global war

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Canada's Liberal government presented a "defence policy update" last week that pledges tens of billions of dollars in increased military spending and outlines plans to procure a vast array of new weapons to ensure that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has the means to wage war around the world.

Titled "Our North, Strong and Free: a Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence," the update is notable for the breadth of ruling class interests, ambitions, and strategic commitments it outlines. Invoking Canada's "diverse population, extensive global presence, and commercial ties," it asserts that Canada must have the military capabilities—working in conjunction with the US, and its other NATO and Five-Eyes imperialist allies—to wage war on every continent and ocean so as to uphold "global stability" and a western-imposed "international order." Space and cyber-space are similarly identified as key arenas of military conflict for which Canada must prepare.

Like the 2017 defence policy statement that it builds upon, the update is not a national strategy assessment. But it does spell out a predatory, military-strategic vision. "Instability at home and abroad" are "increasing quickly" it asserts. If Canadian imperialism is to secure its global position, it must be at the centre of the growing global conflict that pits the United States, "our closest ally," against Russia and China.

Canada, the update affirms, is at the core of NATO's "western" and "northern flanks" in the US-NATO instigated war with Russia. Moreover, as "an Atlantic and Pacific nation that shares a continent with the United States, Canada lies at the geographic middle" of the "strategic competition... centred in the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions" that "will define" the world's "future."

As the update observes, Canada is already deeply involved in the Ukraine war; the US-led military-strategic offensive against China, including provocative "freedom of navigation operations" in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait; and in Washington's wars and intrigues in the Middle East. Like Washington, Ottawa has provided Israel with arms and political support as it massacres the Palestinians in Gaza and pursues aggression across the Middle East. In addition to Russia and China, the update specifically names Iran and North Korea as strategic threats to Canada.

Although the update does not say so in so many words, it makes clear that Canada is already at war and must rapidly accelerate and expand its preparations to wage war. It reiterates Ottawa's oft-repeated vow to militarily support Ukraine for as long as it takes, claiming "the stakes could not be higher." It also highlights Canada's role in leading the NATO "forward" forces in Latvia, where the current CAF deployment is to be more than doubled to 2,300 by 2026, and the importance of greatly enhancing the military's capacity to

strike Russia from the Canadian far north.

It also refers on multiple occasions to the need for the CAF to apply the "lessons learned" from the Ukraine war. Drawing those lessons is among the specific goals of the recently concluded 10-year Canada-Ukraine military-security pact.

Citing the Ukraine war as well as the shortages caused by the COVID-19 pandemic's disruption of supply chains, the update emphasizes the need to develop new technologies, including military applications for AI, and Canada's military-industrial capacity. The war "has confirmed the need for large forces and combat power, well-supplied by standing inventories of ammunition and spare parts, backed by a strong industrial base to re-arm over time." Two immediate goals set out in the update and directly tied to waging the Ukraine war are expanding Canada's production of munitions and establishing a "greater strategic reserve of battle-decisive munitions."

As suggested by its title, a major focus of the defence policy update is the need to dramatically expand Canada's military capacities in the far north, so as to counter both Russia and China. It notes that due to climate change, by 2050 the "Northwest Passage" (a sea-channel that Canada considers its internal waters but whose sovereignty is contested by the US) could be the shortest route from East Asia to Europe.

Expanding Canada's military prowess and reach in the Arctic is part of an ongoing commitment from Ottawa to "modernize" NORAD, the Canada-US joint aerospace and maritime defence command, for great-power "strategic competition" in the 21st Century.

Established in 1958 at the height of the Cold War, NORAD, as the update boasts, is the world's only joint military command. Last year the Trudeau government committed to spending C\$38 billion over the next 20 years on NORAD modernization. The update outlines further steps to bolster Canadian and NORAD capabilities in the far north. These include setting up a network of "northern operational support hubs;" building a satellite ground station in the Arctic; procuring airborne early warning aircraft; and deploying new specialized maritime sensors on Arctic and other off-shore vessels.

"Our North" emphasizes that the importance of NORAD to the Canada-US economic and military-strategic partnership that since 1940 has been the cornerstone of Canadian imperialism's global strategy. With US global hegemony under threat and Washington responding with protectionist and unilateralist policies that frequently roil its allies, the Canadian ruling class is all the more anxious to maintain the closest ties with Washington and Wall Street. Its strategists frequently argue that Canada must advocate in tandem for a "North America First" and "Fortress North America" strategy. While Ottawa publicly eschews such language, hoping to uphold NATO and

other multilateral institutions and frameworks, its default posture is to cleave to the US.

In this vein, the defence update stresses that strong North American defences are pivotal to the ability of both North American imperialist powers to exert power and wage war around the world. “A secure North America,” it asserts, “creates strategic dilemmas for adversaries, and enables Canada to reinforce allies in crisis or conflict.”

The policy update announced an additional \$8 billion in military spending over the next five years and more than \$72 billion over the next 20 years. This is on top of the enormous sums the Trudeau government already allocated under the 2017 defence policy framework, which announced plans to hike Canada’s military spending by 70 percent by 2026.

Since then, the trade union and New Democratic Party-backed Liberal government has embarked on a massive armament drive, headlined by new fleets of 15 warships, 88 F-35 fighter jets, and attack drones.

The new spending will push Canada’s defence budget from the current \$30 billion or so per year to \$49.5 billion by 2029-30. This represents a hike from 1.33 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) to 1.76 percent. If defence-related spending from other departments were included, a government official told the *Toronto Star*, Canada’s overall expenditures would be “in the zone of \$57.8 billion” in 2029-30.

Among the major new initiatives announced in the update are:

- The purchase of a new fleet of attack helicopters at a cost of more than \$18 billion
- Establishing a worldwide military satellite communications system, \$5.5 billion
- Obtaining long-range missile capability, \$2.6 billion
- The creation of a joint CAF cyber command with the Communications Security Establishment, the Canadian component of the Five Eyes global spy network to carry out offensive and defensive cyber-war operations globally, \$2.8 billion

“Our North” also announces that the CAF will explore the adoption of a vast array of additional weapons systems, including more advanced replacement submarines, tanks, and armoured all-terrain vehicles.

Welcoming the policy update, US Ambassador to Canada David Cohen said it was “a substantial down payment toward Canada’s pledge to meet its NATO commitment to spend at least two per cent of its GDP on defence.” While praising Canada’s role in arming and training the military forces of the far-right Zelensky-led Ukrainian regime, Washington has been pressing the Trudeau government to hike military spending faster.

Significantly, at the press conference where the defence policy update was released, Prime Minister Trudeau suggested that Canada will consider the purchase of nuclear-powered submarines and said it is in discussions to join the anti-China AUKUS (Australia, UK, US) military alliance.

One further element of “Our North” merits brief comment. In keeping with the government’s political posture, it tries to give Canadian imperialism’s plans for global war an identity politics gloss. It pledges the CAF will integrate “gender perspectives in military operations and institutions” and will give the Inuit and other aboriginal peoples in the far north a major role in the militarization of their traditional lands.

The Liberal government’s defence policy update must serve as a

warning and call to action for the working class. In recent months, all the major imperialist powers, including the US, Japan, France, Germany and the UK, have announced record military budgets and multi-year programs to dramatically increase their arsenals of mass destruction. Canadian imperialism is following suit.

Indeed, the corporate media and Conservative opposition’s response to the announcement that tens of billions more are to be diverted to making war was that this is woefully insufficient. Far too much of the money is budgeted for the next decade and the military’s ranks need to be rapidly expanded, they clamoured. The *Globe and Mail*, the traditional voice of the Bay Street financial elite, said the government had done “a passable job in articulating the mounting security threats facing Canada,” but chastised it for not immediately moving to NATO’s 2 percent GDP bench level. “Plans to come up with a plan, the exploration of options: they all add up to delay, not action.”

The Conservatives led by the far-right populist Pierre Poilievre were even more scathing, accusing the government of failing to address “years of neglect.” The NDP echoed the Conservatives, only adding that they too were responsible for the governmental “neglect” of the military. At the urging of the trade unions, the NDP responded to the outbreak of the NATO-instigated Ukraine war by entering into a formal government alliance with Trudeau so as to ensure the Canadian ruling class had “political stability” in waging war abroad and imposing “post-pandemic” austerity and inflation-driven real wage cuts on the working class.

Behind the backs of the population, Canada’s political and military-security establishment, like that of its allies, is embroiling the Canadian population in a global conflict that has already resulted in war with Russia, Israel’s imperialist-backed genocide in Gaza, and an escalating campaign of US provocation and threats that threaten to explode into war in the Asia Pacific.

As twice before in the last century, crisis-ridden capitalism is hurling humanity into world war, only today it would be a war among nuclear-armed powers. This can only be stopped by infusing the growing global movement of the working class against capitalist austerity, attacks on social and democratic rights and imperialist war with a revolutionary socialist perspective—the fight for workers power and for an end to capitalism, the root cause of war, and social inequality and immiseration.



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