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Top European leaders visit Canada, as Ottawa takes on still larger role in US-led aggression against Russia and China

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg made high-profile visits to Canada at the end of last month.

Scholz was principally interested in securing German imperialism greater access to Canada's abundant energy and mineral resources. Speaking to a business audience in Toronto, Scholz observed that "Germany"—which is playing a leading role in NATO's proxy war against Russia over Ukraine—"is moving away from Russian energy at warp speed." He then proclaimed, "Canada is our partner of choice."



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (third from left) and NATO Secretary General (third from right) touring NORAD facilities in Nunavut (Photo credit: NATO)

Stoltenberg's focus was on the Arctic and the Arctic Ocean, which he stressed at every opportunity are major arenas in the imperialist powers' strategic conflict with both Russia and China. Accompanied by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Stoltenberg visited Canada's far north, as well as the Canadian Armed Forces' air base in Cold Lake, Alberta, a key installation for NORAD—the joint Canada-US North American aerospace and maritime defence command.

In his capacity as NATO Secretary General, Stoltenberg has frequently travelled to Canada. Nevertheless, this was the first time that he or any of his predecessors had visited the Canadian Arctic.

Both Scholz and Stoltenberg lauded Canada and the trade-union and NDP-supported Trudeau Liberal government for their provocative and belligerent role in the war on Russia. This has included helping instigate the war, joining Britain in spearheading the push for crippling economic sanctions, funnelling hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of weapons to Ukraine, and deploying Special Forces to Ukraine, where they are providing its military with intelligence and tactical and strategic direction.

Taken together, Scholz and Stoltenberg's visits underscore not only that Canadian big business is eager to profit from a war that is roiling the world economy and could rapidly escalate into a catastrophic nuclear conflict. Canadian imperialism is assuming an ever more significant role in the US-led military-strategic offensives against both Russia and China, and is itself a protagonist in the imperialist repartition of the world that the Ukraine war has initiated.

Scholz's visit to Canada was far from a standard diplomatic jaunt. Lasting three days, it was far and away the longest state visit to date of his nine-month long chancellorship. He was accompanied by Robert Habeck, the Vice-Chancellor and Economic Affairs and Climate Change Minister, as well as the CEOs of several of Germany's largest transnational corporations including Volkswagen, Mercedes-Benz and Siemens.

Moreover, as the German press noted, previous to Scholz's visit it was unheard of for the head of Germany's government to visit North America without visiting Washington.

Berlin's sudden interest in Canada is motivated by German imperialism's need to secure alternate sources of energy and other strategic resources as it wages war against Russia, prepares for confrontation with China—which NATO now characterizes as a strategic “challenge” to its “interests” and “security”—and seeks to position itself to act independently of, and if need be, against Washington.

German capitalism needs these resources both to fuel commercial war—including for dominance in electric vehicle manufacture and other “green” industries—and to pursue German rearmament. Much as the Ukraine war has dislocated Germany's economy, the ruling class has enthusiastically welcomed and prosecuted it, seizing on the fighting as the opportunity to implement their longstanding plans to make Germany Europe's largest military power and pursue their strategic goal of dominating Europe, as a first step to vying for global dominance. Within days of the war's outbreak, Scholz announced a tripling of the military budget, to thunderous applause from the German parliament.

Talks between Trudeau and Scholz centered on Germany's access to Canadian sources of liquefied natural gas, hydrogen fuel, and the minerals and rare earths that are needed for high-technology goods, including battery production. To Scholz's chagrin, Trudeau was reticent about pledging Canadian natural gas to Germany. He would only commit Ottawa to supporting development of Liquid Natural Gas capacity on Canada's east coast in so far as it was “commercially justifiable.” The building of oil and gas pipelines and the role of natural gas in Canada's transition to a low-carbon economy have long been the subject of bitter conflicts between rival sections of Canada's capitalist elite.

Trudeau was much more forthcoming on the question of working with Germany to develop a hydrogen fuel export industry. Scholz and Trudeau signed a five-page “declaration of intent” establishing a Canadian-German “hydrogen alliance,” and set a goal of 2025 for the start of regular Canadian exports of liquefied hydrogen fuel to Germany.

Scholz and Trudeau traveled to Newfoundland, where the provincial government recently lifted a moratorium on wind farms, with a view to using wind power to fuel the production of hydrogen fuel.

More than a dozen hydrogen fuel export projects have been proposed to Canadian governmental authorities, with various big business interests competing to make use of Atlantic Canada's deep-water ports as conduits to Europe.

Nova Scotia billionaire John Risley, who is involved with World Energy GH2, a US-based biodiesel company that has plans to build a plant in Stephenville, Newfoundland, told the *Globe and Mail* that “this is a global opportunity. The wind blows in a whole bunch of other places around the world, and we are in a race with those jurisdictions.” Trudeau told reporters the Canadian government will ease regulations so liquid hydrogen projects can gain environmental and other regulatory approval more rapidly.

During the Toronto leg of Scholz's Canada visit, the heads of Volkswagen and Mercedes-Benz signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with Ottawa to secure access to minerals crucial for battery production, such as cobalt, lithium and nickel, and participate in Canada's fledgling electric vehicle supply chain. The MoUs have not been made public. A Volkswagen board member told the German business newspaper *Handelsblatt*, “We are not opening any mines of our own, but we want to take stakes in Canadian mines and mine operators.”

The day after Scholz departed, NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg began his own three-day visit to Canada.

In a *Globe and Mail* op-ed, published the day he arrived and titled “In the face of Russian aggression, NATO is beefing up Arctic security,” Stoltenberg stressed the “region's importance for Euro-Atlantic security.”

He made the by now well-known point that due to the effects of climate change, which will soon make the Arctic Ocean largely if not completely ice-free, global competition for strategic trade routes and access to the energy and mineral wealth of the region, including that under the ocean-floor, is rapidly intensifying.

Singling out Russia and China as NATO's competitors in the region, Stoltenberg said their increasingly close strategic partnership constituted a challenge to the “rules-based” order—that is to say, the imperialist world order led by Washington, which makes and breaks the “rules” to suit its own imperialist ambitions.

He subsequently crowed that once Finland and Sweden join the NATO alliance, seven of the eight Arctic nations—that is all but Russia—will be NATO members. “Finland and Sweden’s membership,” he declared, “will significantly enhance our posture in the High North and our ability to reinforce our Baltic Allies.” As Stoltenberg’s remarks suggest, NATO views the Arctic as critical to its plans to strategically encircle, threaten and subjugate Russia, with the region constituting the northern flank of an unbroken front stretching from the far north and Scandinavia through the Baltic Sea and all of Eastern Europe to the Black Sea, Ukraine and the Caucasus.

On August 25, Stoltenberg, Trudeau, Foreign Minister Melanie Joly, Defence Minister Anita Anand, and the head of the Canadian Armed Forces, General Wayne Eyre, travelled to Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, site of one of NORAD’s Northern Warning System radar stations. While there, Stoltenberg and Trudeau observed Operation NANOOK, which began in 2007 as an annual military exercise, but since 2017 has consisted of four separate exercises across Canada’s three northern territories and Labrador. The Nunavut portion of this year’s exercise included soldiers from Denmark, France and the United States. The following day Stoltenberg and Trudeau visited, the Cold Lake, Alberta, air base.

During his visit, Stoltenberg repeatedly praised Canada’s plans to spend some C\$40 billion over the next twenty years on “modernizing” NORAD. As part of his emphasis on the strategic importance of the Arctic, he noted that the shortest route for Russian missiles and bombers to reach North America is over the North Pole. At the same time, the NATO Secretary General pressed the Trudeau government—which dramatically raised military spending since 2016 and is in the process of procuring new fleets of warplanes and warships—to rapidly meet the alliance’s minimum military spending target of 2 percent of GDP. This would mean boosting Canada’s annual defence budget to almost C\$55 billion per year from the current \$36 billion.

Trudeau balked at making such a commitment. But in the run-up to this year’s budget, Defence Minister Anand presented the cabinet with spending scenarios that conformed with the NATO target. Moreover the government, even after announcing billions in military spending hikes in the 2022-23 budget, promised further spending announcements after a defence policy review is completed.

Trudeau also made clear that while Ottawa uses NATO to project Canadian imperialist power and influence in Europe, the Middle East and Asia, it doesn't acknowledge a European role in the "defence" of the North American Arctic. That it considers to be an exclusively bilateral Canada-US matter, anchored by NORAD and the three-quarters of a century old Canada-US military security alliance. "We will continue to lead on the defence of North America," declared Trudeau. "But as NATO members, it is, of course, perfectly germane to invite the secretary-general (to Canada) and to highlight the work that we're doing as NATO members in protecting this region."

The Canadian press has said very little about NORAD "modernization." This is consistent with the ongoing efforts of the entire political establishment and capitalist elite to cover up the extent to which Canadian imperialism is fully integrated into Washington's plans for World War III.

In so far as NORAD modernization is mentioned, it is generally presented as a much-needed technical upgrade of the now decades-old early warning radar system. In fact of the almost \$40 billion in new money Canada is investing in NORAD, less than a quarter, \$6.9 billion, is budgeted for upgrading and developing new radar capabilities. As for the remainder, vaguely-worded government documents allot \$6.38 billion to new, advanced air-to-air missiles; \$4.13 billion to updating and integrating command and control systems; \$15.68 billion for improved military infrastructure, including upgrading four CAF bases, and new air-to-air refueling aircraft; and \$4.23 billion for developing new weapons systems.

Washington has welcomed the Liberal government's new NORAD commitments, even while signaling that they view them as only an initial down payment. It is well known that both the Biden administration and the Canadian military-security establishment are anxious for the Trudeau government to formally join the US anti-ballistic missile shield—which, its name notwithstanding, is aimed at giving US imperialism the capacity to wage a "winnable" first-strike, nuclear war.

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