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Trudeau and Pence plot Canada's role in US imperialist aggression

US Vice President Mike Pence visited Ottawa last Thursday for discussions with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and other senior figures in his Liberal government about Canada's ever-expanding role in Washington's strategic offensives against China and Russia, as well as its floundering regime-change operation in Venezuela.

Trump's vice president has taken on an increasingly important role in articulating and implementing US imperialist aggression, especially against China and Venezuela. In a major address last fall, Pence served notice that US imperialism will deploy all its economic and military might in thwarting China's rise.

The joint statement Ottawa and Washington issued at the conclusion of Pence's talks with Trudeau made clear that China was a key topic of their discussions, and that Canada is aligning itself ever more completely with Washington in its confrontation with Beijing. This includes lending support to Trump's trade war against China—Washington recently raised its tariffs on \$200 billion in Chinese goods to 25 percent—and the US drive to prevent China from breaking into 5G and other cutting-edge technologies.

The statement called for the release of two Canadian citizens, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, who Beijing detained late last year in retaliation for Ottawa's arrest on a US extradition warrant of Meng Wangzhou, Huawei's chief financial officer. It went on to assert that Canada and the United States advocate “constructive, results-oriented

engagement with China that concretely demonstrates respect for the rule of law, human rights, and fair and reciprocal trade.”

Thursday’s statement marks a deepening of Canada’s close collaboration with US imperialism, which is seeking to shore up its eroding world power through military aggression and trade war. These unilateral and protectionist policies echo those of the great powers in the pre-world war 1930s and raise the specter of all-out war between nuclear-armed power.

In this conflict, Canadian imperialism has left no doubt as to where it stands. The Harper Conservative government signed on to Obama’s anti-China “Pivot to Asia,” including with the signing of a secret 2013 agreement to more closely coordinate Canadian and US military operations in the Asia-Pacific. Under Trudeau, Canada has announced a massive rearmament program that will boost military spending by more than 70 percent by 2026 and begun regular naval deployments to the South China Sea and Malacca Straits.

Last December, on the very day that Trump met Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the G-20 summit, Canadian authorities, in close consultation with their US counterparts, detained Meng in Vancouver, BC, on trumped up charges of illegally doing business with Iran. These charges could result in Meng being jailed in the US for up to 30 years.

In recognition of Canada’s reliable support for his anti-China drive, Trump announced last month that tariffs of 25 percent and 10 percent imposed on Canadian steel and aluminum imports respectively would be lifted. The US President imposed the tariffs last year as a pressure tactic during the negotiations on revising the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Nonetheless, the Trump administration wants Ottawa to go even further. Pence appealed publicly on Thursday for the Trudeau government to ban Huawei from Canada’s 5G network, a continuation of his bullying of US allies in Europe on the same issue. “We have been very clear with Canada,” declared Pence, “and with all of our allies, that we consider Huawei incompatible with the security interests

of the United States of America or our allies ... across the world.” Trump administration officials and leading Democrats, like US Senate Intelligence Committee Vice-Chair Mark Warner, have repeatedly threatened to reduce security cooperation with Canada if it does not cede to their demands concerning Huawei.

Trudeau responded to Pence's demand by noting that Huawei's role in the development of Canada's 5G network is currently under review by Canada's military-intelligence apparatus, and that this review is expected to conclude shortly. Both the Conservative Official Opposition and the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP) have called on the government to follow the US lead and ban Huawei.

Pence and Trudeau's push to pass the revised NAFTA, which has been dubbed by Trump the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement or USMCA, must be seen within this context of Canadian imperialism's staunch support for Washington's drive to maintain US global hegemony.

USMEC will transform North America into a more explicit and aggressive US-led trade bloc with the aim of challenging any and all economic rivals. It includes an effective US veto over any free trade deal between either Canada or Mexico and China.

Reflecting Canadian imperialism's dependence on Washington for the pursuit of its own global predatory interests, the Trudeau government was compelled to make this and other concessions to US big business in the NAFTA renegotiation. Pence all but acknowledged this on Thursday when he made a ham-fisted attempt to help Trudeau fend off criticism over USMEC by claiming the Canadian prime minister had driven a "hard bargain."

Canada's trade unions have supported the Liberal government in its close collaboration with the Trump administration and in its increasingly aggressive global role. They have voiced no criticism of the Trudeau government's National Defence Policy and rearmament plans and they cooperated closely with the government and big business in the NAFTA talks. Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) President Hassan Yussuff served on Trudeau's NAFTA advisory committee, and Unifor's Dias served as a semi-official government advisor and negotiator.

The day before Pence's Ottawa visit, the Liberals introduced a bill into parliament for the adoption of USMCA. Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador took a like step on Thursday, and the Trump administration is soon expected to file paperwork committing it to presenting the deal to Congress within 30 days.

Beyond China, Pence and Trudeau also discussed the two countries' efforts to overthrow Venezuela's elected government. Pence praised Canada's leading role in the Lima Group, a grouping of US allies in the Americas that has followed Washington in declaring self-appointed interim president Daniel Guaido the legitimate leader of Venezuela, and in imposing punishing sanctions on the people of Venezuela.

That Pence, who has led the way in making blood-curdling military threats against Venezuela, should have such laudatory words for Canada's role is an acknowledgement that Ottawa, with its pose as a defender of "human rights" and opposition "at this time" to US military intervention in Venezuela, is providing useful cover for the US-orchestrated regime-change operation in the country that has the world's largest proven oil reserves.

Pence and Trudeau also talked about the Ukraine, where both the US and Canada are pursuing a provocative anti-Russia policy. Ottawa and Washington's multibillion-dollar support for the fascist-spearheaded coup in Kiev five years ago that brought a far-right, anti-Russian government to power, was followed by the deployment of 200 Canadian troops to western Ukraine. There they are training Ukrainian soldiers and National Guard personnel to, in Trudeau's words, "liberate" Ukrainian territory, a reference to the Russian-majority enclaves in eastern Ukraine that seceded following the ultra-nationalists' 2014 seizure of power in Kiev.

In March, the Trudeau government announced that the military deployment to the Ukraine, which complements the operations being conducted by thousands of Canadian and US military personnel along Russia's borders in the Baltic and Poland, was being extended for three years to 2022.

As is the case whenever imperialist conspirators meet, the real content of the Pence-Trudeau talks was concealed behind a wall of propaganda. Readers and viewers of Canadian newspapers and TV news shows were informed that a key point in the talks was when Trudeau raised concerns with the Christian fundamentalist Pence about attacks on abortion rights in the US and around the world. This comes as the Trump administration fans the drive by a whole series of US states, including ones led by Democratic governors, to impose hardline anti-abortion legislation with the aim of ultimately overturning the 1973 US Supreme Court Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion.

This transparent piece of political theatre was aimed at putting some daylight between Trudeau's Liberals and the far-right Trump administration under conditions in which on the key issues of foreign and military-security policy they are marching in lock-step.

A secondary motivation for the Liberal government raising the abortion issues was so they could posture as a "progressive" alternative to the Conservatives ahead of this fall's federal elections. A social conservative Christian, Conservative leader Andrew Scheer has previously advocated for anti-abortion legislation, and as part of his successful 2017 Tory

leadership campaign he said that he would give Tory MPs a free vote on the issue if it came before parliament.

3 June 2019