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Biden revives North American Leaders' summit, presses Trudeau on China, Obrador on refugees

US President Joe Biden hosted a three-hour summit Thursday with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador.



President Joe Biden speaks from the State Dining Room of the White House, Tuesday, Aug. 31, 2021, in Washington [Credit: AP Photo/Evan Vucci]

The North American Leaders' summit was the first between the leaders of the US, Mexico and Canada since 2016, when Barack Obama was US President.

As part of his “America First” policy, Biden’s predecessor, the fascist-minded Trump, scorned Washington’s traditional multilateral alliances and pursued economic protectionism and trade war. He repeatedly threatened to tear up NAFTA (the North

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American Free Trade Agreement), ultimately imposing a revised agreement, USMCA, aimed at consolidating a US-led protectionist North American trade bloc. USMCA was concluded largely through separate bilateral negotiations between the US and Mexico and the US and Canada, and without any face-to-face trilateral talks between the leaders of the three North American neighbours.

Thursday's "Three Amigos" summit was meant to draw a stark contrast with the state of North American relations under Trump. In reality, the difference is one more of style than substance.

Like Trump, Biden has made thwarting China's rise, if need be through war, the pivot of US foreign policy. To the consternation of both Canada and Mexico, he is pursuing an "America First" economic agenda, which, even if it is directed principally against China and Europe, threatens their core interests. And, like Trump, Biden is presiding over savage repression along America's southern border to prevent refugees from exercising their right to asylum, while bullying Mexico's government to undertake more of the dirty work.

Biden has made much of his advocacy of a return to "multilateralism," arguing that Washington's geostrategic aims, above all in countering China and Russia, can best be accomplished by reviving and expanding US-led alliances like NATO. This was the motivation behind the sudden unveiling last September of the anti-China AUKUS (Australia-United Kingdom-United States) military-security alliance in the Indo-Pacific. But US imperialism, whether under Trump or Biden, cannot restore its global hegemony without ruthlessly asserting its interests against all of its rivals, including ostensible allies. AUKUS was forged at the expense of France, with the US secretly agreeing to supply Canberra with a fleet of nuclear submarines in place of French-made conventional ones. It has added new urgency to the calls in Paris and Berlin for Europe to equip itself with the military means to act independently of and even against Washington.

Thursday's summit concluded with the issuing of a lengthy statement under the title "Building Back Better Together: A Secure, Prosperous North America." It begins by calling for an enhanced partnership to "face incredibly complex global challenges" and ensure North America "remains the most competitive and dynamic region in the world." It concludes by pledging support for the "Summit of the Democracies" that Biden is

convening next month to rally America's allies behind a still more aggressive stance against China and Russia under the guise of defending human rights and democracy.

Although Beijing figures large in the calculations of all three North American governments as they develop their tripartite alliance, the word "China" does not appear once in their joint statement. Similarly, the statement papers over their differences over Biden's "America First" economic policies.

It pledges that North America's governments will jointly fight COVID-19. In fact, all three governments have systematically placed the protection of profits and investor wealth over human lives, resulting in a catastrophic loss of life, and they are now using vaccines as the pretext to eliminate all remaining measures aimed at mitigating the virus' spread. According to the official figures, which the excess mortality statistics show to be a gross undercount, in the 23 months since COVID-19 was first identified, the pandemic has killed more than 760,000 Americans, 290,000 Mexicans, and 29,500 Canadians.

"Building Back Better Together" invokes the pandemic in announcing that the three countries will work together to strengthen supply chains. This strengthening is part of the US-led drive to increasingly "decouple" North America from China, so as to weaken its rival economically and ensure the US has the independent productive capacity to prevail in trade war and all-out military confrontation with Beijing. The Trudeau government has offered Canada's large deposits of rare earths and other minerals as an alternative to China and agreed earlier this year to a bilateral strategy to make US and Canadian companies world leaders in the lucrative "clean energy" economy (see: "[Biden and Trudeau revamp Canada-US alliance for trade war and military conflict](#)").

The statement also commits the three countries to collaborate on developing strategic minerals, including Rare Earths, whose production China currently dominates, that are essential for the production of high-technology goods and armaments.

Reports and official readouts of the various bilateral meetings held on the sidelines of the summit indicate that they were the venue for some of the blunter and more substantive discussion among the three leaders.

The North American imperialist powers, Canada and the US, both chastised Mexico for purportedly favouring Pemex, the state-owned oil company, over foreign-owned energy companies and otherwise not doing enough to open the Mexican economy to foreign investors.

Trudeau and Biden agreed to initiate a Canada-US “strategic dialogue on cooperation in the Arctic” and “a strategic dialogue on the Indo-Pacific to collaborate on regional security, the rule of law, good governance, and their approaches to China,” according to the Canadian government readout of their bilateral meeting.

The Trudeau Liberal government, following on from the Harper Conservative government, has integrated Canada ever more fully into Washington’s military-strategic offensives around the world, and especially against China and Russia. Nevertheless, Trudeau has been attacked by both the Democratic and Republican Party leaderships and Canada’s opposition parties, including the trade union-backed NDP, for being “too soft” on China. In recent weeks, Ottawa has been scrambling to show that it has got the message. It deployed a Canadian warship on a provocative US “freedom of navigation” exercise in the Taiwan Strait last month and has announced that it is formulating an “Indo-Pacific strategy”—a strategy that as the Trudeau-Biden meeting readout now indicates will from the get-go be closely coordinated with Washington.

The new Canada-US “strategic dialogue” on the Arctic, which due to climate change is emerging as a major arena of competition between the North American imperialist powers and Russia and China, will no doubt impact upon the already announced joint Canadian-US commitment to “modernize” NORAD, the Canada-US aerospace and maritime defence command, for a new era of “strategic” rivalry.

Biden and Trudeau also committed, according to the readout, to “further strengthen and expand cooperation between the Five Eyes countries,” that is the US, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. This commitment suggests that Ottawa is exploring, as many Canadian imperialist strategists advocate it should, joining the AUKUS anti-China alliance.

The Canadian prime minister raised a whole series of trade complaints with his US counterpart. But because the two sides found no common ground, Ottawa’s readout of the

Trudeau-Biden talks made no mention of them. At the press conference after the summit, Trudeau asserted that the very first issue he raised with Biden was the president's support for a provision in his Build Back Better legislation that, in the name of fighting climate change, would provide a \$12,500 rebate on the purchase of made-in-America, "union-made" electric vehicles.

Under conditions where the auto industry is being fundamentally transformed by the transition to electric vehicles, the Canadian ruling class sees the rebate as an existential threat to the country's second largest export industry and argues that it is a blatant violation of the terms of the newly negotiated USMCA pact. Mexico is of a similar view.

However, Biden and his aides dismissed the Canadian complaints, insisting that the proposed rebate scheme conforms with USMCA. The Biden administration views the rebate as a key component in its strategy to make the US the world leader in electric vehicle production, as well as a means of boosting the trade unions, whom they are depending upon to suppress the class struggle and whip up hostility towards China.

Trudeau, from all reports, made no progress on his other trade-related complaints. These included a push for a Canadian exemption from the "Buy America" provisions of the Biden administration's new infrastructure program and a request for Washington to quash Michigan's bid to close down a pipeline involved in multiple damaging spills that transports western Canadian oil via the US to Ontario.

Since the advent of the Trump administration, the Trudeau government and the Canadian ruling elite as a whole have argued that Canada must counter "America First" protectionism by pressing Washington to adopt a "North America First" or Fortress North America policy instead. It is in the interests of US imperialism to accommodate Canada, they contend, because it is an integral part of the US-centred North American economic bloc and provides natural resources pivotal to fuelling the US war machine.

In pursuit of this predatory agenda, the Trudeau government bent over backwards to collaborate with Trump, remaining conspicuously silent even as he sought to establish a presidential dictatorship and nullify the outcome of the 2020 presidential election.

The cross-party support for Canada championing “North America First” has been accompanied by the push for Canada to share more of the military burden of propping up American imperialist dominance. In June 2017, the Liberal government adopted a new defence strategy that initiated a 10-year drive to increase the annual defence budget by 70 percent to over \$32 billion.

Five years on, there is a clamour within ruling class circles for Canada to align itself still more closely with Washington in its war drive against China and assume an even larger role in it. To cite but one example, on Thursday, *Globe and Mail* senior columnist John Ibbitson urged the Liberals and Conservatives to join forces and “show” Canada has a “coherent response to the challenge of China” by adopting an Indo-Pacific “strategy” that includes joining both AUKUS and the Quad (the quasi-military alliance of the US, India, and Washington’s chief Asia-Pacific allies, Japan and Australia).

Like Canadian imperialism, the Mexican bourgeoisie also hopes to deflect US protectionist measures by putting Mexico at the service of Washington in its offensive against China.

According to the *New York Times*, Mexican President López Obrador “seized a moment during the meeting with Mr. Biden and Mr. Trudeau to warn of rising competition from China.” “It is a paradox,” Obrador told them, “that so much money circulates throughout North America, and the ports of the Pacific are overwhelmed with merchandise from Asia.”

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