

Does the NDP Want a War with Russia?

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Does the NDP want to go to war with Russia? Unfortunately that is the logic of a recent statement by its deputy foreign affairs critic.

In an interview with Ukrainian-Canadian media outlet New Pathway, Heather McPherson said the government should promote Ukraine joining NATO. Additionally, she wants Ottawa to expand its military presence in the nation. Asked whether the NDP “[support Ukraine’s](#) bid to join the MAP [Membership Action Plan] program and advocate for this with our NATO allies” and “expand both the scope of Operation Unifier and number of CAF [Canadian armed forces] personnel within the program?” McPherson responded:

“The NDP will continue to strongly support Ukraine’s bid to join the MAP program and we have and will continue to push the government to advocate for this with our NATO allies. That Prime Minister Trudeau and (Foreign Affairs) Minister (Marc) Garneau have been unwilling to explicitly state their support for Ukraine’s bid and their failure to adequately support the bid via advocacy efforts and multi-lateral diplomacy is very disturbing.

“Further, the NDP would expand both the scope of Operation Unifier and number of CAF personnel within the program. In December 2018, the NDP called for an extension of operation UNIFIER after an unprecedented act of aggression by Russia which seized three Ukrainian ships and their 20 crew members off the coast of Crimea. As you know, in March 2019 the operation was renewed. The support needs to be renewed and increased to acknowledge recent increased aggression by Russia.”

Image on the right: Heather McPherson (Source: Yves Engler)



McPherson's position is highly provocative. As part of Operation UNIFIER, 200 Canadian troops "train" Ukrainian forces that have [integrated far right](#) militias who use the Nazi "Wolfsangel" symbol and praise officials who helped slaughter Jews and Poles during World War II. When extending the mission in 2018, the Liberals also eased restrictions that required the Canadians to stay in the western half of Ukraine, away from the fighting in the east that has left over 10,000 dead.

Canadian troops also lead a NATO mission in another nation bordering Russia. Alongside 550 Canadian troops in Latvia, Canadian naval vessels have recently patrolled in the Baltic Sea and Canadian fighter jets have been stationed in Romania.

Massing NATO troops on Russia's border is highly belligerent. It also violates a US, German and French promise to Soviet/Russian leader Mikhail Gorbachev regarding the reunification of Germany, an important Cold War divide. In 1990 Gorbachev agreed not to obstruct German reunification, to withdraw tens of thousands of troops from the east and for the new Germany to be part of NATO in return for assurances that the alliance wouldn't expand "[one inch eastward](#)". Now, the alliance includes countries on Russia's border and North American troops are stationed there.

Officially NATO operates on the idea that an attack against one member is an attack against all members. Currently the government in Kiev claims Russia is backing a secessionist movement in the largely Russian speaking east of the country and illegally occupying Crimea so adding Ukraine to NATO would put the alliance on a war footing with Russia.

Fortunately, there's push back to McPherson's reckless position. In retweeting a Canadian Foreign Policy Institute message stating, "Yikes. NDP is criticizing government for not supporting bringing Ukraine into NATO and says it wants to send more Canadians troops there", former MP and foreign affairs critic Svend Robinson wrote: "[NDP should](#) be calling on Canada to withdraw from this discredited Cold War NATO alliance and redirect arms expenditures into fighting real enemies of climate emergency and obscene inequality in Canada and globally. Canada Out Of NATO."

Employing more strident language, Rabble blogger David Climenhaga added: "[Oh FFS!](#) What

is it about Canadian progressives that they have to prove they can be warmongering lunatics too? NATO has no business camped on Russia's doorstep — it's bad tactics AND bad strategy. What is the Canadian Greens position on this? I may have to change my vote." Hoping to stir up dissent within NDP ranks, Green MP Elizabeth May retweeted Robinson's criticism.

My guess is that Climenhaga and Robinson's position is closer to that of most NDP activists, members and even voters. A resolution calling on the NDP to "[actively](#) campaign to get Canada out of NATO" and "remove the NATO nuclear ring around Russian borders" was submitted by two riding associations to the party's recent convention (it was never debated). At a time when NATO had at least a nominal Cold War justification, NDP members voted to leave the organization. After years of internal debate over NATO party members called on Ottawa to withdraw from the alliance in 1969. But the position was partially reversed by the NDP leadership in the mid-1980s, culminating in a 1987 "security" policy paper that equivocated on the subject.

Whether or not one believes Canada should withdraw from NATO, pushing to expand the alliance in a way that could put Canada on a war footing with Russia is reckless.

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