

Top Canadian general stokes fears over North Korea to justify joining US ballistic-missile defence

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The top Canadian military officer in the North American Aerospace Defence (NORAD) command told a parliamentary committee last Thursday that the US would not defend Canada in the event of a North Korean ballistic missile attack.

This sensationalist statement was a calculated attempt by the top brass of Canada's military to stampede public opinion behind its longstanding push for Ottawa to join Washington's ballistic missile defence shield—a program aimed at developing and deploying the technological means for US imperialism to wage a “winnable” nuclear war.

Appearing before a special session of the House of Commons Standing Committee for Defence, called to discuss North Korea and the war danger on the Korean peninsula, NORAD's deputy commander, Lieutenant-General Pierre St-Amand, said, “We're being told in Colorado Springs [NORAD headquarters] that the extant US policy is not to defend Canada. That is the policy that's stated to us.”

St-Amand's claim took government and opposition MPs alike by complete surprise. Not only has North Korea, an impoverished country now in the cross-hairs of US imperialism, never issued any threat to attack Canada, let alone with a ballistic missile. It is, to say the least, highly unlikely NORAD would stand down if Canada were ever to be threatened by a ballistic missile strike, whatever its provenance; if only because the vast majority of Canada's population lives within 100 miles of the US border, making it next to impossible to determine whether such a missile was aimed at Canada or the US until immediately prior to impact.

St-Amand admitted as much under questioning, stating that yes, the Pentagon might in the “heat of the moment” take steps to bring down the incoming missile, but the Canadian military would be absent from that discussion.

Canada's military top brass was never satisfied with the decision of Paul Martin's Liberal government in 2005 not to

join the US ballistic missile (BMD) defence program in the face of mass popular opposition to the George W. Bush administration and its illegal war of aggression against Iraq. A number of reports by think tanks have since called for Canada to reconsider the decision and in recent months several prominent Liberals have called on the government to join BMD, including Senator Romeo Leblanc and former Defence Ministers Bill Graham and David Pratt.

Underscoring the sensationalist character of St-Amand's claim and the military's blatant intervention into the democratic process, Mark Gwozdecky, deputy minister for international security at Global Affairs Canada, acknowledged that Pyongyang has made “no direct threat to Canada” and in fact views Ottawa as a potential avenue for communicating with the United States. Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland met with her North Korean counterpart on the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation conference this summer, and Canadian diplomats, including Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's national security adviser, travelled to North Korea in August to secure the release of a Canadian pastor who had been detained by Pyongyang.

In pressing for Justin Trudeau and his Liberal government to increase military cooperation with the US, including by joining BMD, the military is kicking at an open door. However, the government is concerned of a popular backlash if it is too closely associated with Trump's bellicose “America First” foreign policy. As Evan Solomon wrote recently in *Macleans*' magazine following discussions with senior government officials, “The political challenge for the Liberals is that they believe Canadians don't want to do a big military deal with the unpopular Trump.”

The Liberals, nonetheless, are fully committed to advancing Canadian imperialism's predatory global interests by expanding Ottawa's seven-decades-old military-security partnership with Washington, including by assisting the US in its provocative incitement of tensions with North Korea.

In June, Foreign Minister Freeland stated in a keynote foreign policy address that Canada must be ready to use “hard power,” i.e. wage wars, and Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan announced a 70 percent hike in military spending. The Liberals’ new defence policy avoided dealing explicitly with the issue of BMD, but prepared the ground for such a discussion by pledging to partner with Washington in the modernization of NORAD. At the same time, the Liberal government has deployed hundreds of Canadian troops to Eastern Europe to lead one of NATO’s battalions on Russia’s border, extended Canadian military training operations in support of the virulently anti-Russia regime in Ukraine, and expanded Canada’s role in the Mideast war in Iraq.

Moreover, the Trudeau government is intimately involved in the Trump administration’s preparations for war with North Korea. Since the US president declared early last month that he would rain down “fire and fury” on the impoverished country and Defense Secretary James Mattis vowed that the US had the capabilities to obliterate the North Korean population, Canadian government officials have focused all of their criticism on the North Korean regime. Not a word of criticism has been uttered by a single government official of Trump’s and Mattis’ incendiary threats.

A small but politically symbolic contingent of 15 Canadian military personnel participated in the joint US-South Korean military exercises in late August, a deliberate provocation that prompted Pyongyang to launch another missile test and conduct its sixth nuclear weapon test.

The Canadian Armed Forces are also integrated into the US military build-up throughout the Asia-Pacific region, which, like the targeting of North Korea, is aimed at encircling, isolating and preparing for war with China. Canadian ships recently returned from a months-long mission in the region that saw them operate in the hotly-contested South China Sea, and call at South Korean ports to conduct joint operations with Seoul’s navy.

Earlier this month, the Canadian Armed Forces co-hosted with US Pacific Command the Indo-Asian Chiefs of Defence Conference, a gathering of over 20 military commanders from the Asia-Pacific region in Victoria, British Columbia. According to Chief of the Defence Staff General Jonathan Vance, the conference provided a forum “to discuss concerns of mutual importance, including, but not limited to, common security challenges, promotion of military relationships, and fostering regional collaboration.”

These policies are being implemented behind the backs of the population, concealed with rhetorical commitments to “human rights,” a “feminist foreign policy” and “peacekeeping.”

A critical role in burnishing the Trudeau government’s “progressive” credentials is being played by the trade unions, which, as Ottawa continues to ratchet up tensions with North Korea, are collaborating closely with the Liberal government in the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the Trump administration. The chief goal of these talks is to create an overtly protectionist, US-led North American trade bloc, which will be used to project US and Canadian imperialist interests around the world against their economic and geopolitical rivals like China.

The corporate media has buried any reference to Canada’s aggressive posture towards North Korea and China. Instead, all of the major media outlets breathlessly amplified St-Amand’s sensationalist remarks as part of their ongoing efforts to portray North Korea and its rudimentary nuclear weapons program as the chief threat to global peace. A sample of headlines over recent days suffices to convey a sense of the tenor of the coverage: “What would happen if a nuclear weapon hit Canada” (CTV News); “Canada should join ballistic missile defence system, but it will cost us: experts” (*Global News*); and “Of course we should join missile defence. We should have done so long ago” (*Global News*).

Support for intimate cooperation between the Canadian and US militaries is overwhelming within the political establishment. Over the past quarter century, Canada has directly participated in all but one of the US-led wars of aggression.

In 2015 the CBC revealed that top military officials from the US and Canada met repeatedly in 2013 to discuss the possibility of establishing a joint intervention task force composed of troops from both countries under a single command structure that could be deployed anywhere in the world. The generals even discussed the possibility of merging the American and Canadian militaries entirely. (see: “Why are Canada’s politicians mute about the Canada-US military integration plans?”)



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