

Canada to co-host meeting with US to prepare for war with North Korea

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2 December 2017

The Canadian government has announced it will host a US-led international meeting on North Korea early next year. In what amounts to the convening of a war council, Justin Trudeau's Liberal government will invite all of the participants in the Korean War (1950-53) to Ottawa to discuss a "diplomatic solution" to the crisis.

References to a negotiated settlement are for public consumption alone, with the Trudeau government well aware that a conflict on the Korean peninsula, which would likely be fought with nuclear weapons and cause the deaths of millions, is deeply unpopular. The true purpose of the gathering was let out of the bag by Liberal MP Andrew Leslie, a former army general who served in Afghanistan, who declared on Wednesday that the meeting would show a "united front" towards Pyongyang.

Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland revealed that she has been in talks with US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson for months on arranging the meeting. She did so the same day as she condemned North Korea's latest missile test, describing the impoverished country's rudimentary weapons program as "a direct threat to the world," and adding, "we cannot tolerate this threat." Freeland declaimed against the "repeated North Korean provocations" in remarks broadcast on CBC.

This turns reality on its head. In truth, chief responsibility for the war danger on the Korean peninsula lies with US imperialism, which has been systematically goading North Korea into a response to its aggressive military build-up in south Korea and throughout the Asia-Pacific region. President Donald Trump has issued bullying and bloodcurdling threats against the regime of Kim Jong-un, including his infamous declaration at the UN that Washington would "totally destroy" the country of 25 million people if necessary.

In what amounted to the latest indication that a US-led military operation is imminent, the *New York Times* reported a day after Freeland's remarks that Trump plans to remove Tillerson, who has spoken of reaching a diplomatic settlement with Pyongyang.

Washington's main target in a conflict with North Korea would be China, which both the Obama and Trump administrations have sought to isolate and encircle by deploying increased levels of military resources to the Asia-Pacific and stepping up economic pressure. US ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley confirmed this Thursday, ominously warning Beijing that if it does not stop oil exports to North Korea, "we can take the oil situation into our own hands."

Freeland's pledge to invite China to the proposed gathering cannot disguise the fact that Canada's ruling elite is fully on board with Washington's anti-China strategy. As the Socialist Equality Party noted in its recent statement calling on Canadian workers to join the construction of an international anti-war movement, "Both Washington and Ottawa view China as the real obstacle to continued US dominance over the world's most rapidly growing economic region and the Trump-incited North Korean crisis as a means of placing pressure on China, long Pyongyang's principal ally." (See: Oppose Trudeau and Trump, the Canada-US alliance, and imperialist war! For a working class counter-offensive based on socialist-internationalism!)

Canadian media outlets, led by the *Globe and Mail*, have been engaged in an incessant anti-China campaign ahead of Trudeau's departure to Beijing this weekend for talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping. The *Globe*, speaking on behalf of the Bay Street financial elite, urged the Liberal government not to proceed with free trade talks with Beijing. Instead, the Canadian bourgeoisie is pinning its hopes on establishing an even more overtly protectionist North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Trump so as to uphold the global interests of North America's twin imperialist powers against their Chinese rival.

Canada has played a warmongering role throughout the developing crisis on the Korean peninsula this year. Ottawa has maintained a studious silence on the aggressive moves by the United States, and Trump's incendiary comments, while denouncing every action by North Korea as a "provocation."

The Liberal government has backed up its words with

deeds, deploying Canadian warships to the South and East China seas to participate in US-led exercises aimed at provoking China and testing cooperation with the South Korean navy. At the end of August, a small contingent of Canadian troops joined a US-South Korean military exercise, which prompted North Korea to fire a missile over Japan.

The assembling of the Korean War coalition, notwithstanding the diplomatic language being used to choreograph the meeting, is itself a major provocation. The US-led onslaught begun in 1950 laid waste to most of North Korea, claimed the lives of over 3 million people, destroyed the vast majority of the North's cities, and raised the prospect of an all-out war with China and the Soviet Union. Canada participated in the slaughter with the deployment of 25,000 troops, over 500 of whom lost their lives. Canadian air and naval support also participated in the conflict.

Freeland's leading role in organizing the North Korea summit is noteworthy. In her foreign policy address delivered to Canada's parliament in June to coincide with the release of the government's new defence policy, she proclaimed that "hard power," i.e. war, has to be a key part of Canadian foreign policy. She praised the "outsized role" played by US imperialism over the past seven decades in stabilizing global capitalism, neglecting of course to refer to the millions who have perished or been maimed in Washington's endless wars around the world. She also cited the economic rise of China as a threat to Canadian imperialist ambitions.

One day after Freeland's bellicose speech, Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan presented Canada's new defence budget plan, which will see military spending increase by a whopping 70 percent over the coming decade. The Canadian military will purchase an expanded fleet of fighter jets, warships and armed drones so it can wage war in conjunction with American imperialism around the globe, including in the Asia-Pacific.

The fact that the Trudeau government's latest announcement is bound up with war preparations was underscored Thursday, when the CBC revealed that the Canadian and US militaries conducted joint drills last spring aimed at testing the response to a nuclear weapons attack. The Canadian government has also reportedly reviewed secret plans to move the government to a secure location outside of Ottawa in the event of a nuclear attack.

The portrayal of these exercises as defensive measures should fool nobody. Discussions are ongoing within the Canadian ruling elite about joining the US ballistic missile defence system, an initiative aimed at allowing Washington to wage a "winnable" nuclear war. BMD plays a key role in the \$1 trillion nuclear weapons modernization program

unveiled by the Obama administration and continued and accelerated by Trump.

Chief of the Defence Staff General Jonathan Vance, well aware of the widespread opposition to Canada's integration into BMD, affirmed Thursday that the Canadian military has not, thus far, held talks with the US about joining. But he effectively admitted that such talks would commence soon when he noted that in-depth discussions on modernizing NORAD (North American Aerospace Defence Command) are due to get under way. He stressed that one threat over the next 20-50 years that would have to be considered within NORAD, the joint Canada-US military-security partnership initiated during the Cold War, would be ballistic missiles.

The Liberal government and top military brass are able to engage in this deeply unpopular war conspiracy behind the backs of the population because no opposition exists to it within the political establishment. Canada's ostensibly "left" New Democratic Party (NDP) has maintained radio silence on the North Korean situation, tacitly accepting the portrayal by the government and mainstream media of Pyongyang as the aggressor.

In addition, the NDP seized on Trudeau's trip to Beijing to pour fuel on the fire of the anti-China campaign. In a statement drawing heavily on the right-wing rhetoric of the Trump administration and laced with Canadian nationalism, NDP critic for international trade Tracey Ramsey denounced China for "steel dumping ... which put Canadian companies at a dangerous disadvantage." Ramsey also railed against Beijing's "questionable record on currency manipulation," "unfair trade practices" and "the behaviour of state-owned enterprises in China, including through the takeover of Canadian companies that work on sensitive technologies."



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