

Canada joins US in stepping up threats against North Korea at Vancouver summit

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Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland and US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson jointly hosted a meeting in Vancouver Tuesday in what amounted to a war council against North Korea. The gathering brought together all of the participants on the US side during the 1950–53 Korean War and excluded Russia and China, in itself an act of belligerence indicating that preparations for a catastrophic conflict on the Korean peninsula are far advanced.

Freeland set the tone in her opening remarks to the one-day conference, declaring, “(N)o true progress can be made in addressing instability on the Korean peninsula until North Korea commits to changing course and verifiably and irreversibly abandoning all its weapons of mass destruction.” Tillerson agreed, appealing for “increased pressure” to be applied to the regime of Kim Jong-un in order to compel it to engage in “credible negotiations” to dismantle its nuclear weapons. Addressing reporters after the summit, Tillerson ominously warned of the need to “recognize that the threat is growing.” He continued, “And if North Korea does not choose the path of engagement, of discussion, negotiations, then they themselves will trigger an option.”

The talk of negotiations and securing a diplomatic solution is a smokescreen behind which preparations for military conflict are well advanced. On Monday, one day prior to the conference, a front-page article in the *New York Times* revealed the advanced state of preparations within the US military for an all-out onslaught on Pyongyang. These included the deployment of thousands of Special Forces troops to the Korean peninsula on the pretext of providing security for the Winter Olympics.

President Donald Trump has issued a series of blood-curdling war threats against North Korea over recent months, from his August threat to rain down “fire and fury” on the country, to his infamous declaration at the UN General Assembly in September that the US military

was ready to “totally destroy” North Korea and its 25 million inhabitants.

Freeland’s attempt to portray Pyongyang as the aggressor is a flat-out lie. The war danger on the Korean peninsula is being incited by Washington and its allies, Canada chief among them. Ottawa has avoided any criticism of Washington’s provocative role throughout the Korean crisis, even when Trump made his incendiary remarks to the UN.

This is part of the broader agenda of Justin Trudeau’s Liberal government to deepen Canada’s already extensive and long-standing military-strategic partnership with Washington. Canada has been a key participant in virtually all of US imperialism’s wars of aggression over the past quarter-century, and the current government has made clear it intends to continue such policies by hiking military spending by a massive 70 percent over the coming decade.

In her keynote foreign policy address last June, which accompanied the announcement of the defence spending increase, Freeland explicitly praised the “outsized role” played by the United States in stabilizing the “global order” in the post-war period, something she argued had to be defended against “threats” such as the rise of China.

The character of the Vancouver meeting as a war council was made clear beforehand by the decision to include only those nations who fought alongside the United States during the Korean War or provided logistical support, like Japan. From the standpoint of North Korea, which suffered millions of casualties in the conflict and had 18 of its cities razed to the ground, the meeting can be seen as nothing other than a provocation.

In comments Monday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov attacked the decision to hold a meeting that excluded his country and China, saying, “We openly said that we think this meeting is harmful.”

Even some Canadian and US analysts acknowledged that the presence of China and Russia at any meeting discussing sanctions on North Korea would be essential if the sanctions were to be effective. The implication, as Canadian Broadcasting Corporation correspondent Murray Brewster suggested, is that talk of diplomacy is largely for public consumption and the discussions have already moved on to military action, including the use of warships to stop trading vessels bound for North Korea. This made the absence of China and Russia from Tuesday's meeting "more understandable and possibly chilling."

A defence analyst who testified to a House of Commons committee recently summed up the growing war fever, writing in *Maclean's* magazine, "I believe that despite the risks, the US and its allies must consider a resumption of the Korean War in order to de-nuclearize the Korean peninsula. There is a brief window of perhaps one year in which allies have 'good' military options--meaning options that would not result in global mass destruction--to permanently eliminate North Korea's nuclear arsenal."

Estimates are that a war on the Korean peninsula fought "only" with conventional weapons would lead to the deaths of 300,000 people within a matter of hours. The conflict would rapidly draw in other states such as China and Russia, raising the spectre of the "good military option" turning into a global inferno, with catastrophic consequences not only for the population of the Korean peninsula, but for billions in East Asia and around the world.

The Vancouver meeting was preceded by a number of incidents pointing to just how far advanced discussions are on the Canadian ruling elite's participation in a military conflict. General Jonathan Vance, chief of the defence staff, declared that the Royal Canadian Navy has sufficient personnel to join in the proposed interdiction of naval shipping transporting goods to North Korea. The seriousness of Vance's remarks is shown by the fact that the Canadian Navy currently has a submarine, HMS Chicoutimi, stationed off the coast of Japan, and participated with two frigates in a series of exercises with the US and South Korean navies.

Marine interdiction would go even further than the UN Security Council resolution passed last month that called on states to impound ships in their territorial waters carrying illicit goods to North Korea. The adoption of an interdiction policy would raise the prospect of a direct confrontation with Russian or Chinese ships, creating a

potential flashpoint that could trigger a much broader military conflict.

The night before the meeting, Freeland and Tillerson had a ministerial dinner with Canadian Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan and US Secretary of Defense James Mattis. Although the topics of their discussions were not made public, one can well imagine the aggressive options the four ministers considered.

The *Globe and Mail*, the Canadian bourgeoisie's "newspaper of record," published an editorial on its website on the day of the conference urging the Liberal government to seize the opportunity presented by the Korean crisis to open talks on joining Washington's ballistic missile defence (BMD) shield. Notwithstanding its name, BMD was developed to make the waging of a nuclear conflict by the United States "winnable."

Alleging that Canadian cities face a real risk of being targeted by a missile from North Korea, the *Globe* advised the Liberal government to "find out what's on the table and open discussions about joining the missile defence program." The *Globe* asserted that Canada was still committed to a diplomatic solution, before declaring that "sometimes you have to conduct diplomacy while wearing a bulletproof vest."

The Canadian ruling elite's desire to join the BMD goes well beyond the issue of North Korea. In 2005, the Liberal government of Paul Martin was forced to abandon Ottawa's participation in the BMD in the face of widespread popular opposition to the Bush administration's illegal invasion of Iraq. The military and intelligence establishment have never accepted this decision, seeing it as a barrier to Canada's strategic partnership with US imperialism. From their standpoint, Canada's involvement in the BMD would assist in the assertion of Canadian imperialist interests around the globe, including in the Arctic, where two major competitors for control over the sea lanes rapidly opening up due to global warming are Russia and China.

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