

Canada toes Trump administration's provocative line on North Korea

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2 September 2017

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau declared Tuesday that Canada is monitoring the security threat posed by North Korea on a “daily basis” and reiterated his government’s endorsement of the Trump administration’s provocative incitement of the conflict with Pyongyang.

In a show of solidarity with Trump’s threat to rain down “fire and fury” on North Korea and Defense Secretary James Mattis’s comment that any conflict would lead to the “destruction” of the North Korean people, Ottawa sent 15 Canadian Armed Forces personnel to participate in the latest joint US-South Korean military exercise. That operation, which concluded August 31, was calculated to enflame tensions on the Korean peninsula and prompted Pyongyang to fire a mid-range missile over Japan.

Canada’s participation in the exercise follows on the heels of the deployment of two CAF naval frigates to the Asia-Pacific, where they visited a base in South Korea. The ships also joined US-led “freedom of navigation” exercises in the South and East China seas. Such exercises are a key part of Washington’s concerted military and diplomatic drive to isolate, bully, and prepare for war with China.

Earlier this year, Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan noted that Canada remains part of the UN Command under whose banner the US waged the Korean War—a war that killed millions, laid waste to most of the peninsula, especially the north, and during which US military commanders repeatedly pressed the Truman administration to use nuclear weapons.

Sajjan added that Canada would again be prepared to go to war against North Korea and, if requested to do so, would consider supplying troops through the UN Command.

Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland was even more strident than Trudeau in supporting Washington’s warmongering. The same day Trump declared that all

options are on the table and ruled out any negotiations with Pyongyang, Freeland baldly asserted, “North Korea’s reckless violation of its neighbours’ territorial sovereignty and its direct threat to Japan’s citizens have threatened both regional and international peace and security.”

Not a word of criticism has been forthcoming from Ottawa of Trump’s bellicose threats, nor of Washington’s plans, initiated under the Obama administration, to spend upwards of \$1 trillion on modernizing the US nuclear arsenal.

The Trudeau government is exploiting the Korean crisis to justify and escalate the militarist foreign policy it outlined at the beginning of June in its defence policy statement and a major speech by Freeland on Canada’s foreign policy.

Freeland’s speech identified China—the real target of Washington’s aggressive war drive in the Asia-Pacific—as potentially the greatest threat to Canada’s “national interests” and said “hard power,” i.e. war, must be a key part of Canadian imperialism’s global strategy. The defence policy review committed the government to a 70 percent hike in military spending over the next decade, new purchases of warplanes, ships, and drones, an expansion of the army and the development of offensive cyber-war capabilities.

A growing number of Liberals have also seized on the alleged North Korean threat to demand Canada revisit its 2005 decision not to participate in the US-led ballistic missile defence (BMD) shield. The program, its name notwithstanding, is aimed at creating the conditions for Washington to wage and win a nuclear war, the eruption of which has become ever more likely in recent months in light of US provocations from the Korean peninsula to Syria.

The House of Commons Defence Committee will hold an emergency sitting prior to the reconvening of

parliament September 18 after the Liberal government acceded to Conservative and New Democratic Party (NDP) requests for a meeting on Canada's response to North Korea. While the NDP officially opposes Canadian participation in BMD, foreign affairs critic Helene Laverdiere urged Ottawa to work with "allies," above all the US, to bring about a "diplomatic" solution of the North Korean crisis. The silence of all candidates in the NDP leadership race on the danger that US provocations could lead to war with North Korea further demonstrates the party's tacit approval of Washington's aggressive stance.

Speaking after a meeting of the Defence Committee last week, John McKay, former parliamentary secretary to Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan, declared he is in favour of Canada joining the ballistic missile defence shield. "Canada wants to be in control of as much of its own sovereignty as it possibly can," he said. "I think the threat is real. I think the military experts need to be listened to."

Liberal Senator Romeo Dallaire, who is one of the principal Canadian proponents of the "humanitarian" imperialist Responsibility to Protect doctrine, added his voice to those in favour of joining BMD. Ignoring the fact that BMD makes a nuclear conflagration more likely by undermining "deterrence" and "mutually assured destruction," he enthused, "We're talking security, we're talking new capabilities, we're talking about potential technological spinoffs and advances."

Former Liberal defence ministers Bill Graham and David Pratt are also urging the Trudeau government to join BMD, as is former Conservative Defence Minister Peter MacKay. On Thursday, the current Conservative defence critic, Erin O'Toole, said it was time for Canada to revisit the 2005 decision.

Trudeau's remarks August 23, which ruled out Canadian involvement in ballistic missile defence at least in the short term, are worthless. The Liberal government has left the door open to Ottawa's participation in the program by pledging to deepen military-security cooperation with the United States, particularly through the modernization of the North American Aerospace Defence (NORAD) command, which was established during the Cold War to target the Soviet Union.

Wayne Easter, a Liberal MP who was the party's defence critic prior to the 2015 election, admitted as much when he told the *Hill Times* that Trudeau's comments did not preclude the government from changing its mind.

A report from the Canadian Press this week noted that the Liberals did not provide costing in their new defence

policy for modernization of NORAD's radar systems for early detection of "threats" to the continent. It added that discussions on what this will entail are only in the early stages, but the possibility of including ballistic missile defence in the modernization will invariably be raised.

NORAD's modernization is a key plank in the Trudeau government's strategy to deepen Canada's longstanding strategic partnership with Washington. Since Trump took office in January, Trudeau has gone out of his way to establish close working relations with the most right-wing president in American history.

With the NAFTA renegotiation, the Liberal government has embraced the idea of a North American protectionist economic trade bloc under Washington's leadership, which will create the basis for US imperialism to aggressively confront its economic and geopolitical rivals around the world—China and Russia chief among them—as part of its reckless efforts to retain global hegemony. Canadian troops have also been deployed to Eastern Europe to lead one of the battalions involved in the US-led NATO encirclement of Russia, and Canadian Special Forces continue to serve alongside US troops in Iraq.

While politicians and media reports have focused on North Korea to justify reviving the ballistic missile defence debate, the Canadian ruling class is also motivated by growing conflicts in the Arctic. Ottawa lays claim to vast swathes of the Arctic Ocean and its resource-rich seafloor and confronts rival claims from Denmark, the United States, and, most significantly, Russia.

Responding to the crossing of the Arctic Ocean by a Russian tanker in record time last month, the *Globe and Mail* published an editorial warning of the mounting strategic threat in the region and urging Canada to "set some rules." The editorial continued, "The previous government's northern strategy may have been half-baked and sparsely funded, but at least its central thrust served to reconfirm Canadian sovereignty."

The *Globe* and Canada's ruling elite want that "thrust" to be intensified with an increased military presence. Upgrading the North Warning System is critical to this strategy, since it would enable Ottawa to monitor the increased activity of Russia in the far north and strengthen US-Canadian preparations for war with Russia.



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